BY

# HENRI D'ORLEANS

TRANSLATED BY

B. PITMAN

*WITH TWENTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS*

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# PREFACE

An introduction or a preface to a book generally aims at giving the reader a notion of what the author has to say. In this case, the title of the work is amply sufficient to indicate my intentions, and in giving a narrative of my brief voyage from Tonkin to Siam, I am desirous of simply relating what I saw and how I came to see it, following the order indicated by my itinerary.

A book, however modest may be its dimensions or aim, is more or less of a creation, the plan being the skeleton upon which the muscles and flesh come to be laid. These latter give the shape, the beauty, and the elegance, but the bony frame is none the less the essence of the work. In the present case, my skeleton is not difficult to discover, consisting of the principal lines followed by me in my journey. I should not have referred to this had I not hoped, by asking the reader's help in the construction of it, to quicken his interest in the completion. Possibly, after he has edified and invigorated the skeleton himself, he will find more pleasure in beholding it covered with

muscles and flesh, for it will be more or less his own work.

Upon starting from Paris at the end of November, 1891, I had two objects in view: first, to complete in lower Tonkin the information all too hastily collected at the close of our previous voyage, to get together further particulars, to examine the work which had already been accomplished, to see what remained to be done, and, in short, to engage, so far as a limit of time and the means at my disposal allowed, in a sort of inquiry into our situation in Tonkin. The work was one which could be executed without much travelling about, in a country relatively civilised, and all that was needed was to keep one's eyes and ears open and to be observant of what was going on.

But—and this was the second object I had in view—it is difficult to travel so far without making an excursion, however brief, into the Laos. M. Pavie had depicted that country to me in such seductive colours, he had told me of what interesting collections were to be made and documents to be gleaned that I felt an irresistible attraction thither. Moreover, a voyage into Laos would also give me an opportunity of studying one of the three main commercial routes to Tonkin, that of the Black River, and enable me to compare it with that of the Red River, which M. Bonvalot and myself came down two years ago. I shall be able to form an idea for myself of one of the outlets for the trade of Tonkin, which is a good deal talked about, but of which little is known; and in returning

by way of Siam, I shall be certain of finding ready to my hand fresh documents relating to the means and the cost of transport, so being in a position to draw a parallel, with figures to back it up, between the different routes to the Laos.

In indicating the object I have in view, I shall at the same time have let the reader see how I have divided my narrative, commencing with a brief reference to my arrival first in China and then in Tonkin; of my sojourn in the lowlands, of the crops which it is sought to cultivate, of the mines which are being worked, and of the budding industries. I will endeavour to set forth the result of my inquiries as briefly as possible.

The second part, after I have referred to the ascent of the Black River, will be devoted to my visit to the Laos region, and if some documents of a purely scientific character are passed over, the reader may possibly be attracted by the description of Luang Prabang, with its fine scenery, passable climate, and bright and cheerful inhabitants.

I shall not be surprised if some of those who cast their eyes over this preface treat me as an impostor, because I put forward this glowing description of the banks of the Mekong in order to disguise the bitterness of the pill contained in the third and last part of my book. For in this there is neither sunlight, nor greenery, nor living waters, nothing but a mass of black in the shape of figures, comparative tables, prices, and distances. It is by arguments based upon these figures that I would fain plead for an improved

commercial outlet upon behalf of Tonkin, of a colony which we took possession of in order to secure the shortest and most direct route to the great markets of China.

Such is the plan of my work, but, before carrying it into execution, I cannot but ask myself whether, in doing so, I shall not make enemies all round.

If I address myself to the people in Tonkin, I shall in some cases not be sufficiently well posted; in others, I shall not say enough; in others, again, too much. In addressing myself to people at home, I shall be boring them with details which scarcely interest them, with names hard to pronounce, and with very arid topics. So the best thing I can do is to ask each individual reader to think that I am writing for the other, and to assure them that I am addressing myself to every true-hearted Frenchman; in a word, to all those whose one desire is to labour for the greatness of their fatherland.

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# AROUND TONKIN

## CHAPTER I

Arrival at Hong-Kong—A Visit to Canton—Its Trade—The Chinese Town—The *Bateaux à Fleurs*—Return to Hong-Kong—Experiments with Tonkin Coal.

THE *Sidney* has just cast anchor in the port of Hong-Kong, and facing us, enveloped in a mantle of mist which seems as if it had been imported from England, the tall houses rise one above the other upon the hillside, which is scored as with a broad streak by the line of the funicular railway.

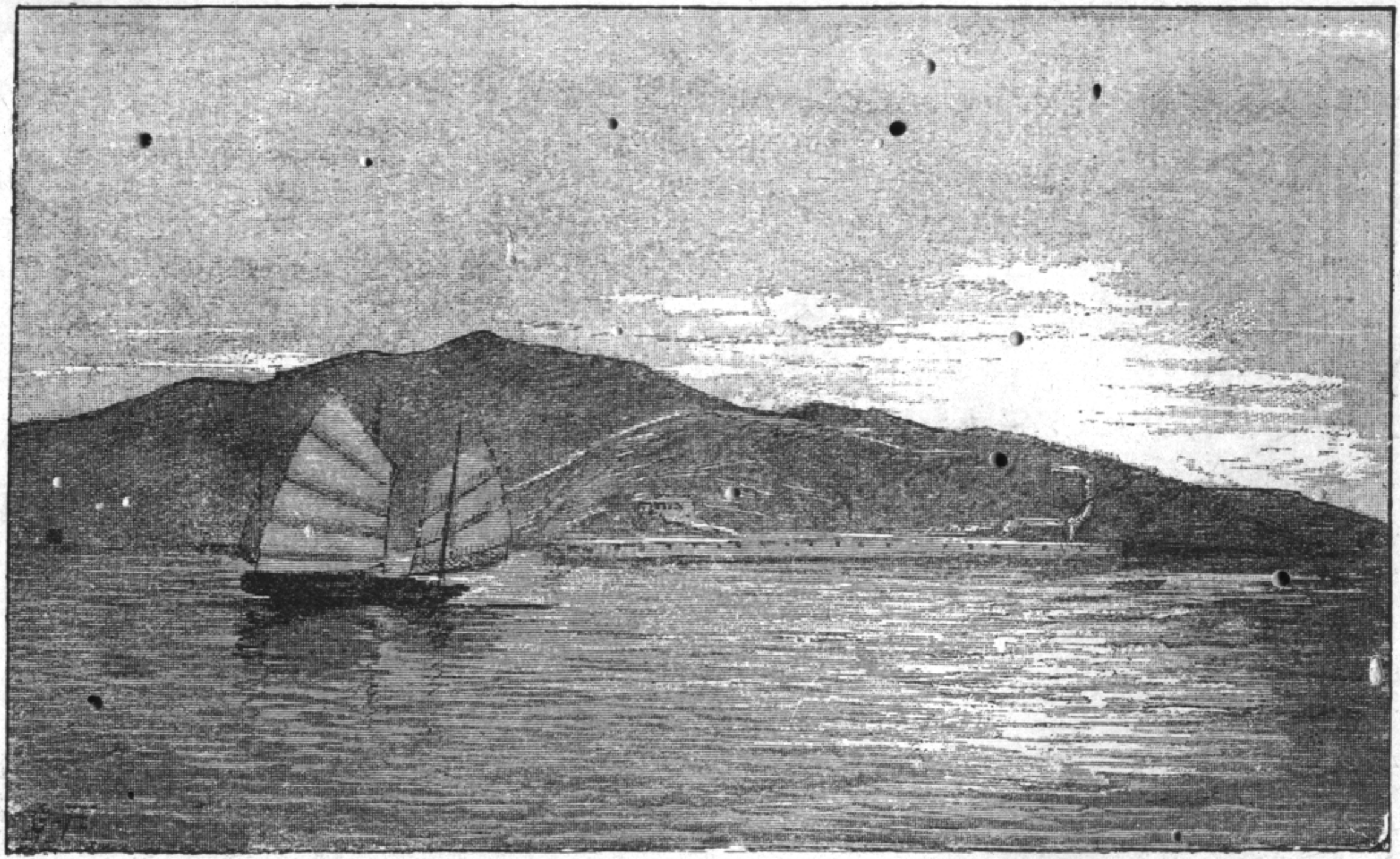
Our steamer is at once swooped upon by a multitude of coolies, who have hoisted themselves up, one after the other, over the sides of the ship. Long bamboo canes with grappling-hooks attached to the ends serve them as scaling-ladders. These coolies give one the impression of being the material out of which pirates could be made with very little trouble, and they remind one not a little of the ladrones. In the swell caused by the blowing off steam, the junks come into collision with one another, despite the efforts of the women in charge of them; and these women, whose movements do not appear to begin the

least hampered by the children they carry on their backs, are armed with poles by means of which they endeavour to keep the boats clear of one another, interlarding their efforts with the most violent imprecations.

Amid all this hubbub we are landed by the steam launch at the hotel. Our force is at present very small, consisting solely of Charles and myself. The former, as I have already explained in the account of my travels in India, is a most valuable companion, a good judge of what is worth collecting, very zealous, and easily satisfied. He will, as I anticipate, be of great service to me in my travels.

I have no sooner arrived at Hong-Kong than I begin to think when I shall get away, this being my third visit to the English town, and, but for our having encountered heavy weather just before reaching Cape St. James, I should have travelled by another line of steamers which follows the coast of Annam from Saïgon to Haïphong. The prospect of a long voyage in bad weather and on a small steamer deterred me, although by way of Hong-Kong we shall not reach Tonkin any sooner; the only difference is that we have three days less at sea, so I determine to utilise them by making an excursion to Canton.

Two navigation companies, one English, the other Chinese, run steamers from Hong-Kong to Canton and back. These steamers, which are large river-boats of the American type, with several decks, start every day, and their chief source of profit is derived from the goods which they carry and from the native passengers who are crowded into the lower decks



BEFORE BOCCA TIGRIS.

(Entrance to the Canton River.)

steamers carry as many as two or three thousand of them.

The voyage is very interesting. On leaving Hong-Kong and doubling the Island of Lantao, the steamer enters the estuary formed by the Canton River, one of the mouths of the Sikiang, or Western River. After steaming on for a few hours the gulf gets narrower, and we enter the pass of Bocca Tigris, which became famous in the war of 1861. The elevations which overhang the river upon each side are crowned with small Chinese forts, and as we get further up the river this line of heights gives way to flat land very highly cultivated, notably with rice-fields and here and there with clusters of fruit trees.

The scenery, as in all regions where rice-fields abound, is terribly monotonous, and that must be a very strange sight indeed which can attract one's attention. And this we see in the shape of what looks at first like some enormous creeping yellow vermin engendered by the mud, but which, when seen at closer quarters, turns out to be a huge flock of canaries which has been brought out to feed. There is a great trade done in them here, and the flat boats that go up and down these canals carry as many as ten thousand. The boatmen, transformed into bird-shepherds, let their charges out to feed in the daytime and call them in at night by blowing a horn.

A little way further on we pass a Chinese Naval School. A visit is anticipated from a mandarin on a tour of inspection, and the gunboats, manned by smart-looking crews in European dress, are be-flagged, while the pupils in full dress, which consists of a

blue jacket, red and green trousers, and a hat with double feathers, are drawn up in line on deck. Higher up the river a few wooden dams, constructed many years ago for defensive purposes, have been kept in repair by the Chinese from a feeling of suspicion and the force of routine, their idea being to render access to the "City of Pearls" more difficult for gunboats in the event of war.

The first impression Canton gives is one of dull and gray uniformity, with its long stretch of roofs all of the same height and crowded one upon the other as far as the eye can reach. There is no break or sign of any street; only, here and there, a few round towers which resemble feudal donjons, but are in reality pawning establishments. The outlines of a white European church and those of the Catholic cathedral are also conspicuous, while towards the horizon appears a line of low hills. A little further up stream, the breadth of which they help to define, are a mass of boats, pontoons and junks, connected more or less securely one with another by small bridges and forming a sort of floating town.

Canton is a huge ant-hill containing a million inhabitants, a half aquatic, half terrestrial ant-hill, which has been cut down to one level, with here and there an elevation attesting the former existence of heights more or less picturesque.

The European concession, which is formed by an artificial island, is surrounded on all sides by canals. The French fort, which is barely a third the size of the English, is a very ramshackle building and our Consulate is in the English section. Among the 130 or 150 Europeans of Shamen, as the concession is

named, we meet several compatriots, who are as cordial in their hospitality as the majority of those one meets abroad. They nearly all represent large Lyons firms, silk being the principal object of trade at Canton, which, we are told, exports it to the value of £96,000,000 a year. Half of this goes to France. German middlemen are said to make at least £400,000 a year in commission out of the silk trade, for, apart from the French in the colony, there are many German and English houses that supply the Lyons looms.

The purchase of silk requires considerable practice when one has to do with vendors like the Chinese. Each skein has to be unwound and the thickness of the thread calculated by weight in order to see if it is uniform throughout, for there is no sort of deception which is not practised, a very frequent one being to mix together different crops. Very keen in trade, the people of Canton, despite the dealings which they have with them, do not like "the foreign devils," who are obliged to keep a supply of arms in their houses, several of which will, no doubt, be set fire to again in due course, as they were in 1884, when the European Consuls were content with exacting a ludicrously insufficient compensation. At the present time, the hatred which we inspire does not stand in the way of our entering the native part of the town, and in a day one sees, and, let me add, smells quite enough of it. The reader must not be surprised if I refer here to the smell, for in my opinion it is a much more important factor in travel than is generally supposed. I believe, in effect, that, like different animals, each human race has its own characteristic smell, derived from itself, its per-

sort of extract with which every traveller has to make himself familiar. For my own part, I am convinced that were I suddenly to be carried with my eyes blindfolded to the bazaars of Aden, Colombo, or Canton, I should know where I was by the smell. It is, perhaps, the same with us, and the Chinese who come in contact with us and style us "devils, sons of harlots and pigs," to say nothing of other amenities which the Sinophilists so readily excuse, are of opinion that we stink. Be this as it may, Canton reeks with evil odours, and it has more than this in common with other Chinese towns, the streets being so narrow that in many parts it is impossible to walk two abreast. One can see that the population, which is estimated at about a million, is far too closely packed, as is the case in all the other great centres of China.

As in all the East, and as was the case with us in the Middle Ages, each trade or business has its separate street or quarter, and the butchers' quarter would astonish those of our compatriots who are not versed in Chinese tastes and customs, though it is not very appetising to look at the dogs, the cats, the ducks split open down the middle, and the suckling pigs chopped in halves. My own taste takes me rather to the shops of the antiquaries, or the *curios* as they are styled in the hideous patois spoken on the coast of China, but there is little chance of "find" there, as too many Europeans have been on the look-out for rarities. It takes weeks and even months to hunt up and purchase an article of real interest and value, so I have to content myself with a stroll through the streets and an inspection of the shops, from which

use his eyes aright. There is much to be seen in the way of curiosities, for it is hardly appropriate to give the name of "monument," which implies something artistic, to the grotesque Chinese sanctuaries. "Temple of the 500 Genii" is the name given to a pagoda filled with gilded Buddhas, which are placed in rows against the walls like the shrivelled monks in the Capucin monastery at Palermo. Before each idol rises a thin column of blue smoke emanating from a small stick of perfume, and the guide points out in the midst of all these genii a statue gilded like the others but surmounted by a pilgrim's black hat. This is the famous Marco Polo, and the artist who is responsible for this work of art has made a point of giving him a pair of round eyes by way of distinguishing him from the people of his own country.

Then, again, the Temple of the Horrors is a rough delineation of the tortures of hell. But that I do not wish to be wanting in respect for art in the celestial empire, I should be inclined to say that these sculptures are a bad imitation of the scenes of the Inquisition as they are depicted at the booths of French fairs.

There still remained to be seen a water-clock which has been going for six centuries, the place for executions, a potter's field where there are a large number of big jars into which the heads of the decapitated criminals roll, and many more pagodas; but the rate of locomotion in the narrow streets is so slow that it is already dusk, and we are compelled to hurry back before the gates of the town are closed.

But our excursion is not yet over, for outside the

can be seen to the best advantage at night. We are anxious to lift a corner of the veil which masks the pleasures of the Chinese, as in order to form a proper estimate of a people, it is necessary to see them at play as well as at work. I feel, however, that there is something like presumption in attempting to delineate these little Chinese women, with their white faces and darkened eyes, after they have been seen through the coloured glasses of the imaginative Pierre Loti. One who has, like myself, attempted to reproduce the simple but impressive call of the nomad at sunset to his horses as they feed on the steppe, or to depict the grandeur of the snows of Thibet, can scarcely hope to depict the charms of the *bateaux à fleurs* of the Chinese. It is difficult, in these circumstances, to avoid indulging in psychology and dissecting like a naturalist the spectacle which is before one.

Going from boat to boat, we find it no easy matter to keep our balance as we step from one to another, watching the gilded youth of Canton at its pleasures. These boats are all much of the same kind, so a description of one will do for the whole. The saloon is spacious, with a profusion of wood-carving and gilding, while embroidered silk hangings are arranged to right and left like the decorations in a theatre. There are large screens with birds or landscape scenes done in pencil; sentences or golden letters, taken from the principal philosophers, hang on the walls; while from the ceiling hangs a European lamp with blue glasses, which sheds its light upon small tables of veined Yunnan marble, around which the young Chinamen are seated in easy-chairs of red wood,

embroidered. Upon the benches on each side recline the opium smokers, left, like so many inert masses, to their pipe and their lamp. Those who are not smoking are playing cards with small ivory counters which they hold in fan shape, or at dominos, which they strike together with as much noise as possible, while others are content to take some tea and sweetmeats. These are served them by young women, whose faces, with rouge upon the lower lip, and black hair, profusely oiled and ornamented with flowers, or else drawn back upon each side of the head like rams' horns, clearly indicates their calling. But despite their jade earrings, they are not all women of the first class, for I notice that some of them have large feet.

Contrary to the habit of their compatriots, which is to regard foreigners as intruders, two fat Chinamen who have come perhaps from Hong-Kong, ask us to have some tea. We exchange cigars, and a conversation—by gestures—is started, which does not seem to please the ladies, as they are afraid, if seen in the company of Europeans, of losing caste. But they are soon made to hold their tongues by our new friends, who have evidently taken a fancy to us, as they get permission for us to stay and hear the concert. The music is rhythmical and monotonous, but less discordant than usual, the orchestra consisting of a *tamiscen* (Japanese guitar), the chords of which are stretched upon the skin of a serpent, a violin shaped like a thick kammer, a gong, and a sort of drum upon which a woman strums alternately with two wands.

much as we can stand, and we return on board, escorted by a crazy lad, who pursues us with his plaintive cries, as if to reproach us for having come to profane the orgies of his yellow brethren by our presence, but he need not be alarmed; we are not likely to repeat the visit.

We have a morning at our disposal before the departure of the steamer which is to take us to Tonkin, and it is spent in witnessing some experiments with Tonkin coals, to which we have been invited by Mr. Chater. The King of Hong-Kong as he is called, is an Indo-Burmese Parsee, whose brother is still in Burmah, and he is a man of such ability that his fortune and influence have been constantly on the increase. A regular Yankee in regard to the boldness of his schemes and his large-minded views in business, he has been for four years trying to establish the sale of Hong-Kong coals, in the face of many difficulties and severe criticisms, with a perseverance and energy which denote great intelligence. The French Government has, therefore, been well advised in rewarding with the Legion of Honour the important services which he has rendered to our colony.

Mr. Chater is delighted to show us the results which have already been obtained, and one of the trim steam-launches, which are always flitting about the harbour of Hong-Kong, takes us to the large sugar refinery of Jardine and Matheson, the fact that our funnel does not emit any smoke because it burns Hong-Hay coal being, of course, pointed out to us. It is easy to distinguish, by the orifices of the three large chimneys of the refinery, what is the kind of

coal burnt in their respective furnaces : very black smoke being produced by the Japan coal ; gray smoke by the Japan coal mixed with that of Hong-Hay, and no smoke at all by pure Hong-Hay alone.

Before going into the refinery we are reminded that it is in full activity, so that it is not at experiments that we are assisting, but we see it fully employed in a regular way. The boilers are fed by twelve furnaces, the three first of which burn a mixture in equal proportions of Japanese and Hong-Hay coal dust. The latter, we are told, if used alone, would pass through the bars of the grate and would be too expensive, but used in this way, the two combustibles agglomerate and form lumps as big as one's fist, the bits which pass between the bars being very few, and besides they are burnt a second time. The mixture of the two dusts, Mr. Chater tells us, effects a saving, while obtaining the same pressure, of 15 or 20 per cent. on the pure Japan coal. There is less of it, and it emits a long white flame.

The next group of furnaces burn Hong-Hay coal, part of which was extracted eight months ago, and the rest quite recently, the whole of it coming from Nagotna (in Hong-Hay), and the greatest depth from which it was taken being sixty-five feet. The lumps are generally of a good size and lustrous, dirtying the hand when touched, and analysis has shown that they contain about 8 or 9 per cent. of volatile matter and 90 per cent. of carbon.

A layer of Hong-Hay coal from four to eight

inches thick gives as much heat as a layer three times as thick of Japan coal; but the fire must be kept well banked up with a good flame. No special grates are used, and we are assured that the use of Tonkin coal unmixed effects a saving of 25 per cent upon that of Japan.

Experiments made at Oxford have shown that the Hong-Hay and Cardiff coals are identical, and the principal difficulty experienced is in lighting it, what is required being a well-fed fire and a strong draught.

Be this as it may, Hong-Hay coal is now used, to great advantage, in a large sugar refinery, and it is also burnt upon two ferries in the harbour of Hong-Kong. Two government transports have just taken in 500 tons, and the 2,000 tons just brought in by a collier have been rapidly sold off at eight dollars a ton for the lump, and five for the dust. Since the beginning of December (1891), nearly 6,000 tons have been despatched from Hong-Hay.

This is a by no means inconsiderable result, but Mr. Chater hopes to do much more, and says that in a couple of months' time the company will have two, if not three, ships freighted instead of one. Another working will shortly be connected with the wharf at Hong-Hay, and then there will be an output of as much as twenty, or even thirty, thousand tons a month. This coal will be sent as far north as Shanghai, and as far south as Singapore and Colombo, the price at first being 32*s.*, the same as the Cardiff coal, but it will be reduced in a short time. The return freight will be made up of Java sugar, and the travellers who

come back from the extreme east will be able to testify that the Tonkin coal holds the market in several of the greatest ports in that part of the world, while it will be impossible to assert that France has only taken possession of pestilential marshes and a stronghold of pirates.

# CHAPTER II

Arrival in Tonkin—Haïphong, the question of a Trade Port, the Custom-duties—A Visit to the Hong-Hay Coal-fields—Kébao.

A BRANCH line of the Messageries Maritimes effects the service between Hong-Kong and Haïphong, and as the steamers are small and the sea generally very rough, they roll terribly, the voyage being a most disagreeable one.

The steamer stops off Haï-nam, in order that a portly German, who acts as British Consul in that town, may fetch his letters and that some luggage may be landed; while on the following morning we find ourselves at the mouth of the Cua-Cam, which is the river leading up to Haïphong. The coast is a very low one, little above the sea level, and one looks in vain for the vegetation which is to be seen on the banks of the Ganges or the Donaï. There are no trees of any sort, nothing but rice fields, the only break in the plain being the mountain chain of the Dong-Trieu, which is a prolongation of the cliffs in the bay of Halong. Seen from a distance, these large rocks, with their jagged and contorted shapes, make a very striking impression upon the traveller who enters Tonkin for the first time, being so un-

like anything that he has ever seen before. They make one feel as if one were entering into a world of itself, one isolated from the rest of the earth, which has not been made subject to the laws governing other formations. Standing at the entrance to Tonkin, this chain of chalk mountains cannot fail to surprise the traveller, but he is not likely to forget the two words which are so linked with the name of the Dong-Trieu, coal operates, representing as they do the future and the fuel of the colony.

To the left is the small promontory of Cape Doson, on which stand the Villa Joséphine built by Paul Bert, and several hotels and private houses, the late Governor of the colony thinking that this promontory would be a very desirable health resort. His idea has not been abandoned, and efforts have also been made to convert it into a fashionable bathing-place. Concessions were obtained, but these stipulated that the work of building should be completed within a given time, and as capital was scarce, many of the so-called houses were nothing more than mud-huts. But matters have improved during the last year or two, and houses of brick or stone are being substituted for the wretched mud-cabins, hotels are being erected, a carriage road has been made between Haïphong and Cape Doson, and there is even a racecourse being laid out, all that is now wanted being travellers or colonists with money to spend.

After a few hours steaming up the Cua-Cam, we cast anchor off Haïphong, the few gunboats of the French navy and the German merchant-men being the only vessels in the river. The entrance to the port is a very awkward one, and it is gradually

getting worse, the muddy colour of the water indicating the rapidity with which the sand is accumulating at the bar. Here, too, the banks are very low, the ground on the left being made up of rice fields or marshes intersected by small canals, the town of Haïphong being on the right bank. With its docks and shipbuilding yards, its small white houses, many of them surrounded by greenery, its bouleyards, canal, and large hotel, surmounted by a dome, it affords a strong contrast with what it was in 1886, when the site, of what is now the town, consisted of a marshy and unhealthy plain, amid which the few dry spots were occupied by wretched mud-cabins. By dint of energy, activity and perseverance, our compatriots have, so to speak, drained the water out of the ground and turned it off into the canals, they have dried the soil and filled up the hollows with earth brought in baskets by a whole army of coolies, while by draining the marshes they have got rid of the fever which gave such an evil repute to the site of the old town. This is mainly due to the energy of M. Bonnal, the late Resident, and the fact of there having been only one death last year among the European population of Haïphong testifies to the rapidity with which the elements of a town have been evoked out of the mud. It has surprised many English travellers, who are not, as a rule, easily taken aback, and it is a proof the more of our not being so devoid of the colonising capacity as it is so often alleged that we are.

In spite of the works which have already been carried out at Haïphong, its future is by no means assured, and there is very little European trade there. Large vessels cannot arrive there, only those with

about 18 feet draught of water being able to go up the Cua-Cam at all tides, while five times a month, at the moment of the highest tides, it is accessible to ships of 25 feet draught. Even the former are often obliged to wait several hours in front of Doson for high tide before going up stream, and as nothing has been done to prevent the sand from accumulating at the bar, the draught of water is still decreasing. In view of this ever-increasing obstacle in the way of the large vessels, the question has been raised of creating a port elsewhere upon the coast. Quang-Yen, at the mouth of the Song-Gia, would be of little service, as it has but an inch or so more water than Haïphong, and a better one might be found in one of the magnificent harbours formed by the rocks in the bay of Halong. That of Hong-Hay, which faces the coal-fields of that name, is well situated, but access to it is still rather difficult, the depth of water being in many cases not more than from 16 to 20 feet, and it would seem that the shelter of Kébao is preferable, with a depth of 23 feet at the foot of the cliffs, at low water. Moreover, coal is to be found on the spot, and the harbour, half closed in by several islands, would have the advantage of being more easily defended in the event of war.

Whatever site may be selected, I do not think that the creation of a large port on the coast would be immediately ruinous to the future of Haïphong, for the town would always remain a centre for the rice trade, and for the disposal of various native products, and for the river traffic of passengers and goods. Its position at the foot of the intersection of several canals makes it at once a centre and a terminus for fluvial

navigation which no circumstances could affect, and, in spite of its drawbacks, the number of vessels coming up to Haïphong has considerably increased within the last year, the total being 42 as against 20, and of these 15 were French and 14 German. But of the 15 French vessels, 6 were State transports, so that we are still much behindhand in regard to navigation and trade in the far East. During the last fifteen years, the Germans have rapidly given us the go-by, for whereas at one time their firms hired our vessels, the contrary is now the case. We have been too much the slaves of routine; and not having had the hardihood to sacrifice our sailing ships to steamers, we have been left behind in the competition by both Germans and English.

Bad as it is, the situation of our merchant service in this part of the world is not desperate, and our flag ought to occupy a permanent place in the China Seas. This is to be learnt from a report of M. Gueyraud, our Consul at Hong-Kong, who gives in detail the expenditure to be incurred upon trading vessels in these waters and the return to be derived from them, the affair being so profitable that many German vessels are built by the co-operation of small associations formed in the ports of Pomerania and Holstein, tradespeople and even workmen entrusting their savings to the managers of these enterprises. To those who would urge that we cannot do the same because we should have more expenses and because the Colbert law makes it necessary that all the officers and three-fourths of the crew should be French, I may reply, in the words of M. Gueyraud: "French

where the European sailor cannot do the same amount of work as in his own latitudes, have very properly been exempted from the provisions of clause 2 in the navigation act, without forfeiting their right to navigation premiums."

I may add that the registration of our vessels at Saigon would give us an advantage over the Germans, who earn a dividend of from 10 to 15 per cent. upon the capital invested, while one English firm has paid as much as 30 per cent. All that is needed for us to do as well is a little more initiative, the invariable reply of our shippers and capitalists, when they are asked to go into an enterprise in these parts, being "It is a very long way off." And yet we have not hesitated to invest a lot of money in very risky speculations on the other side of the globe, though some of them had nothing in their favour except that they were puffed up to the skies. However, this is not the place for recrimination or for re-opening a wound which has not yet had time to heal.

The question is not what ought to have been done or left undone, but what can be done, and it is the duty of all travellers who return from the far east to try to make plain what is the position which we can and ought to hold, for there is no reason why we should not be at least on a parity with Germany as regards the merchant service. The enterprise, as I would fain repeat, is at once profitable and patriotic.

The number of vessels calling at or coming from Haïphong has, as I have said, nearly doubled in the last year, but the foreign trade of 1891, though much larger than that of 1890, did not reach the same pro-

a million, these figures appearing very small by comparison with those of Hong-Kong, where the English do a trade of forty millions sterling, It is true that Hong-Kong has fifty years' existence, and that the port has not always been very prosperous, passing through many a severe crisis which has only been surmounted by the energetic perseverance of the trading colony. We hold an exceptional position in command of a route by which we can penetrate into China, and we ought to take advantage of it, but if we are ever to attain a commercial prosperity anywhere approaching that of Hong-Kong we must have a deep water port accessible to vessels of any size. The vessels once in smooth water, the goods which they bring must be got into the country. In this connection, a question which naturally suggests itself is—Why did we take Tonkin? In the first place, in order to gain access into China, but this primary object seems to me to have been quite lost sight of. The English tried hard to make Hong-Kong a point of transit, but although for twenty years their efforts were unprofitable they did not, when once the receipts began to exceed the cost, attempt to modify the situation. Hong-Kong had been created a free port, and it has remained such. It was the same with Singapore, and our town of Saïgon owed its prosperity to its free trade until protective duties proved its ruin. A colony is not unlike a child, whose mother, the metropolis, must lead, rear and protect it until, having grown up and gained strength, it is able in its turn to repay the care which has been bestowed upon it. We have been in too great a hurry to make the child pay his way, and have endeavoured to render him productive before he

is out of his nurse's arms. We had not been masters of Tonkin for two years before we surrounded it with a thick wall of custom dues, and in order to gratify a few French traders we arrested the commercial development of the colony, not reflecting that a budding colony needs the maximum of liberty and free action, that the greater the imports and exports the greater the profit. The main thing is to encourage capital to come in and for machinery to be set up, to open up a path to commerce and to make it as plain and clear as possible. This is what has been overlooked, though it ought to have been foreseen that prohibitory measures would disgust the Chinese, who have preferred to stick to the longer route by the Yang-Tse, or by the Canton river. It is, moreover, the custom dues and certain monopolies that encourage smuggling, and smuggling is but a step from piracy. These considerations, among many, no doubt escaped the notice of our legislators when they applied the custom duties to our colonies, and some of them went so far as to reproach the Under Secretary of State for having exempted from duty the English machinery purchased for the Hong-Hay coal fields. It was to be regretted, no doubt, that the material was not French, but I am inclined to doubt, after all I have seen, whether our manufactories could provide what was wanted with the same rapidity and at the same price. But who is to blame for that, and would it be fair not to give a free hand to a large and growing enterprise which is probably destined to cast further lustre and add fresh wealth to the colony?

It is not my intention to echo all the recriminations

voked, for some eloquent pleas in favour of free trade have been made by M. Rolland, agent of the Messageries Maritimes at Saïgon, by members of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Colonial Council of that town. Nor have they been confined to Indo-China, for the protest against protection duties has come from La Réunion and other colonies.

M. de Lanessan, the present governor of Tonkin, in a lecture before the Geographical Society, on Nov. 20th, 1887, has expounded the question at great length, and the pith of what he says is as follows :— "What can you suppose that your factories at Rouen and Roubaix can sell to such people as the Annamites, who have not, one may say, any money in hand? If you want them to buy of us, instead of placing on them custom duties which will prevent them from procuring anything, even the commercial Chinese goods which are subjected to excessive duties and the price of which has been raised, ensure a wise and sensible administration, and open up means of communication."

These words appear to have been forgotten, for their author, in a speech at the Haïphong Club in July of last year, pointed out that, despite the custom duties, Tonkin was developing and its trade increasing daily. In proof of this, he quoted figures showing that the imports had gone up from £760,000 in 1890 to a millión in 1891, the French imports being represented by a third of this increase. But we may fairly ask what figures would have been attained if only trade had been free. But, putting upon one side a momentary gain, there is the future of the colony, and it must not be forgotten, to quote M. de Lanessan

again, "that if the administration is, as I fear, above all things bent upon obtaining money for itself, it is certain to ruin Indo-China, without profit either for the treasury whom it hoped to enrich or for French industry."

Whatever may be the errors of the mother country, they have not, however, entirely prevented the trade of Haïphong from developing or the town from increasing in size. Since my previous visit, two years before, there have been many changes. New streets have been made, fresh houses built, and marshy pools filled in. Plenty of work is being energetically carried on, and the general tone is better than when I was last here, while business transactions appear to be on the increase and a spirit of confidence to have been engendered, this being in striking contrast to the despondency which prevailed in view of the many difficulties and the lack of support tendered by the mother country. The loan has been voted, the new governor has enunciated his programme, his books have been read and his speeches listened to, and it is hoped that he will be true to his promises—such at least were the impressions which I derived from conversations with various people. Good news is also to hand with regard to my proposed journey, letters from friends informing me that they have succeeded in engaging some good "boys," while I hear from the Black River that the district is fairly quiet, and that I shall be able to move about without any escort.

All that I have to do therefore is to go up to Hanoi and make my final preparations before starting upon my expedition.

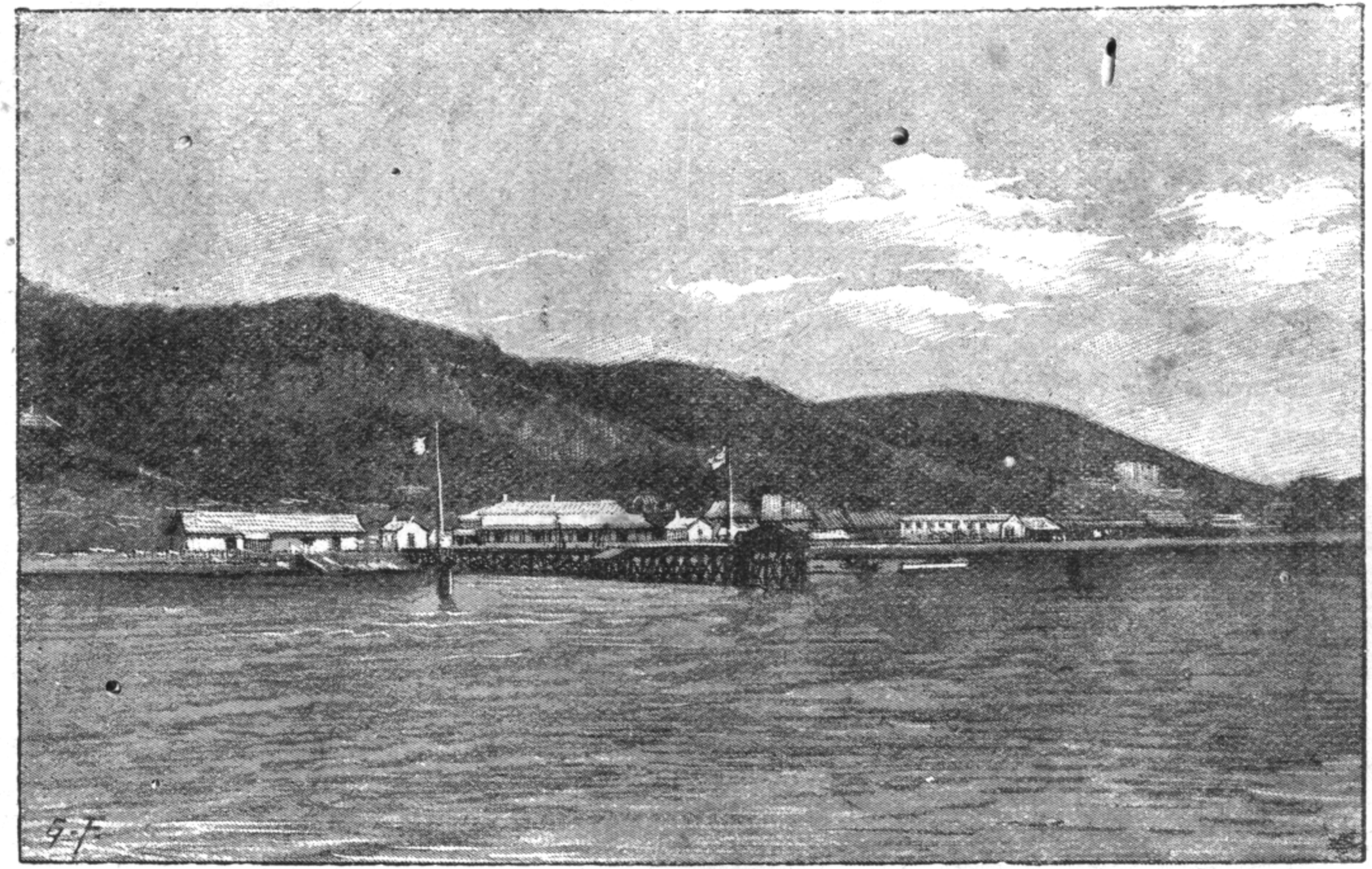
avail myself of the invitation sent me to visit the coalfields of Hong-Hay and Kébao, as it would be a pity, at the cost of spending a few days more on the coast, to let slip a second time the opportunity which is offered me of seeing for myself the effort which has already been expended upon what is the first and perhaps the most important enterprise in the colony. The Hong-Hay sloop *Fanny* comes to fetch us at Haïphong, the windings of the canal when we get out of the Cua-Cam river taking us through some lowlands, the greater part of which are inundated, and which are covered with small marsh plants. After we have been sailing for about two hours, the marshes become less numerous, the ground becomes more hilly, and the fields are under cultivation. A bridge thrown over the stream and clumps of trees a few hundred yards beyond mark the site of the town, residency and post of Quang-Yen, which, owing to its coalfields, will in due course become a much more important place. Beyond this, rising above the ground, are large rocks, which seem to have got quite out of their element, for they look like so many marine monsters which have been driven ashore in a storm and are unable to get back into the water. They appear very grotesque, but, in order to become grandiose, they need the water to reflect them, and they would be more in their place with their base in the ocean.

So we reach the entrance to the celebrated bay of Halong, and I might as well put down my pen, for it is very difficult to describe one of the finest sights in the world, and so different from all others. Let the reader try to imagine hundreds of islets, many of

by a crown or cap of greenery. The sea is calm, its surface scarcely wrinkled by the furrows which our sloop makes, and in colour it is of a deep mysterious blue, which seems, as it were, to conceal immeasurable depths. It would seem, indeed, as if the waters, formerly much higher, had receded after having eaten into the cliffs, for in many places there are large recesses and the summit overhangs, while in others the rock, instead of having any vegetation, runs to a point like a long blade bristling with needles. In all directions, there are small creeks and natural caverns, to which only a small boat can penetrate through a natural archway. The two prevailing elements of grandeur, which add to the majesty of the scene, are solitude and calm. As the sloop advances the route seems to close in behind us, and we may well wonder how we entered this new, unknown and mysterious kingdom. We are in a land of dreams, where the imagination allows itself free course, and it is easy to conjure up pirates and corsairs coming into the recesses of some creek, the access to which is known to them alone, in order to count their spoils. One fancies them dominated by a woman—young, very beautiful, and rather pensive. A deep passion, a struggle between the two rivals, treason, followed by the punishment of the traitor, and then the happiness of the woman disappearing into the terrible archipelago. These are the fancies which course through my brain, and, mixed up with all this, tremendous encounters, flights through grottos with a double issue half full of water, and other daydreams, until my companions hail to me that we

We have reached an immense harbour shut in by lofty walls, the work of nature, while in the background a series of rolling hills indicates the direction of the mainland. Upon the slopes of one of these hills there are to be seen several trim and well-built white houses, and at the foot a sort of pier running out into the sea, with a line of rails over which the trucks are carrying out the coal extracted from the pits close to the shore. The tricolor floats above the pits, and here, at Hong-Hay, an important mining centre is rapidly forming, a town is springing up, a quay has been built and the means of communication are being opened. A homogeneous plan has been traced by men of intelligence, there has been no lack of money to carry it out, and nothing has been neglected to ensure success.

The difficulties, nevertheless, have been very great, the first having been raised by our representatives, and by our administrative system which is always very slow in sanctioning a sound affair. I would call the reader's attention to the dates: the first demand for a concession was sent in to the administration in 1881, but it was not finally granted until 1888. Although the Hong-Hay coal-fields had been talked about for the last fifteen years, they were visited for the first time in the spring of 1881 by M. Mourin d'Arfeuille, the temporary consul of France at Haïphong, and, by arrangement with him, M. Blustein, manager of the Saïgon steam-tramways, sent in, on the 9th of September, a demand for a concession of the coal-fields in the province of Quang-Yen, to the son-in-



ARRIVAL AT HONG-HAY.

General de Trentinian, the French governor, promised to back it up with the Annamite government, the coal having been experimented on board the *Carabine*.

At the end of 1881, two engineers, M. Fuchs and M. Saladin, were appointed by the Minister of Marine to explore the coal-fields and to report upon them. M. Fuchs stated in his report that M. d'Arfeuille had discovered the layer of coal known as the Jauréguiberry mine, and the Minister of Marine, in a despatch addressed to the Consul of France at Haïphong, informed him that Annam was only to grant concessions to French citizens (March 22, 1882), and at the same time transmitted M. d'Arfeuille's application to M. Lemyre de Vilers for him to deal with. The applicants, whose renewed demands are met with fair promises, fail however to get any definite reply, and so matters go on until June 26, 1884, when M. d'Arfeuille and M. de Turenne (M. Blustein having died in the interim) again ask for a concession of the basin of the Hong-Hay, where the presence of coal has been distinctly traced.

The situation has undergone a change, for the protectorate of France over Annam has been recognised by the treaty of Hué (June 6, 1884), the eighteenth clause of which stipulates that "subsequent conferences will regulate the question of the mines and their working." A commission appointed for this purpose drew up a project which appeared in the *Officiel* of December 6, so that M. d'Arfeuille might well hope, after three years of fruitless efforts, that he had at last succeeded.

But this was not to be, for between the time of his

last application and the publication of this project of the commission an important event had occurred. After the investigations made by M. Fuchs in 1881, M. Bavier-Chauffour, the representative of a group of French capitalists, came with two friends, one of whom was an engineer, and prepared the first complete map of the coal-producing regions of the Hong-Hay and Kébao. This work was executed amid perils of every description, due mainly to the refusal of permission for him to arm an escort at his own expense. But if he escaped the pirates, he was not spared by the climate, and he was compelled to go into the hospital at Haïphong. Having recovered from his fatigues, he obtained in the same year from the Court of Hué a concession of the domains of Hong-Hay and Kébao, and the act, signed on August 26, 1884, was legalised by the French legation at Hué. It was not until after this that the French Government instituted a Mining Commission, for the purpose of drawing up a plan for regulating the system upon which they were to be worked. The Commission decided that all mines should be put up to tender, and in the beginning of 1885, M. Lemaire, the French Minister at Hué, having intercepted and deciphered a telegram from M. Bavier to the regents, sent them a note to the effect that "in the name of my Government the treaties between M. Bavier-Chauffour and the Court of Hué are null and void so far as regards the concession and working of mines situated in the territories of Hong-Hay and Kébao. The French Government accepts the full responsibility for this declaration with which M. Bavier-Chauffour may be confronted in the

event of his being inclined to take action in the matter."

A protest of the regents against this measure, addressed to the French Government, was not forwarded to Paris by M. Lemaire, and in 1886 M. Chauffour, fully persuaded as to the treaties concluded with the Court of Hué holding good, endeavoured to execute the first clause of it and to pay 100,000 piastres to the court before August 26. This sum in specie was taken from Hanoï to Haïphong, and from Haïphong to Hué, but as no one would receive it, the money had to be brought back to Haïphong and paid into court. The negotiations with M. Paul Bert, which had got as far as a draft treaty, were arrested by his death, and in March, 1887, M. Bavier arrived at a compromise with M. Bihourd, though it was only on April 27, 1888, that a definite act of concession was passed, the company abandoning the Kébao domain, and in exchange for the reduced territory conceded to it foregoing the treaties signed with the Court of Hué.

The promises made by M. d'Arfeuille seem to have been forgotten, and if, upon the one hand, he can claim the right of discovery, as evidenced by the report of M. Fuchs, upon the other hand his rivals have the advantage of being in possession of a detailed map of the coal-fields and of the treaty passed with the Court of Hué previous to the insertion in the *Officiel* of the proposed regulation of mines—a treaty which had been practically recognised by the representatives of the French Government who legalized the deed. Be this as it may, one may well ask what account had been taken of the second part of Clause 19, the text of which is as follows :—

"It is hereby declared that the coal mines in the province of Quang-Yen, situated along the coast or in the adjacent islands, shall only be disposed of by tender."

Yet the arrangement come to was a private one.

I should be travelling out of my sphere were I to attempt to get together all the materials for an inquiry into the rights of the concession in the Hong-Hay basin. This is by no means my intention.[1]

I merely wished to explain to the reader how it was that mines discovered in 1881 only began to be worked in 1888, and that, so far from encouraging our colonists, the administration seeks to throw difficulties in their way, and I am certain, in speaking thus, that I shall find an echo among all those of our compatriots who are attempting to carry out any project in our extreme Eastern colonies. It is rendering a service to the colonial cause to be as impartial as possible; that is to say, to be as frank in denouncing errors as in setting forth good results. The reader will therefore forgive me if I point out the dark as well as the bright side, and one of the reasons why the prosperity of our colonies is so slow may be found in the dilatory attitude of a red-tape administration.

Now, fortunately, the enterprise is in a fair way of fulfilment, and at the head of it is a most able man,

[1] I have had pointed out to me, and merely mention here, an application for a concession of the coal-fields of Hong-Hay, made in 1887 by M. Récopé. It will be found fully explained, as well as that of M. Bavier, in the letters from M. Bibourd to M. Flourens, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the *Officiel* of August 14, 1887.

under whose impulse such rapid progress is being made that one can scarcely believe one's eyes.

The jetty projects nearly a hundred feet into the sea, and, instead of experimenting with the Tonkin timber, the large piles upon which it is founded have been brought from Borneo at a cost of £12,000. In the course of time this jetty will form a letter T, the two branches being in twenty feet of water at low tide.

There are four lines of rail, each a mètre broad, upon the quay, the sleepers being of steel as in Bengal. These sleepers, each of which costs five shillings, are purchased in England, where there are large quantities of them in stock. The train is made up of trucks with two movable compartments, each holding four tons. Two locomotives are in use; and two cranes, which can load 1,600 tons a day, are being constructed for loading and unloading the trucks.

Before reaching the jetty, the trucks from Nagotna and Hatou will be emptied on to a sifter, or iron sheet with holes about an inch in diameter, in order to get rid of the dust, and the principle adopted at Hong-Hay is not to employ elevators, but to utilise the laws of gravity for getting the work done. The sifter, which will be at Hong-Hay itself, is not yet constructed, and it will be of little use for another six months, when the Hatou railway may have been completed.

We are taken to the workshops immediately upon our arrival, the one being devoted to the manipulation of iron, the other to that of wood, while in the centre is an office from which the work can be supervised. The workmen employed are Chinese, and their wages vary from five to six and sixpence a day,

the town of Hong-Hay not caring to have recourse to Haïphong for its iron-work and building or to submit to the high terms of contractors. The growing town means to depend upon its own resources, and the day is perhaps not far distant when there will be custom for its workshops from outside.

Having left our baggage at the elegant little residence of M. Bavier-Chauffour, we go to breakfast with M. Durrant, who lives rather higher up, in a white house surrounded by a garden laid out with taste, which reminds me of some with which I am familiar in France.

There is no time to be lost, as the train is waiting to take us to Nagotna.[1] The distance is only three miles, and the line passes from one small hill to the other, the intervening valley being covered with marine plants which are under water at high tide. There are no bridges from one hill to the other, the line being carried over embankments, through which drains have been made to let off the surface water.

The cost per mile of this line (exclusive of rolling stock) has been £1,920, and it is instructive to note that this line, though of forty inches gauge, constructed by a private company, has cost less per mile than the Phu-lang-Tuong line of only two feet gauge constructed by the State.

[1] The total concession is about 75,000 acres, with twenty miles of coast. The breadth is as far as the limit of the coal-fields, which is a very indefinite one, and the concession is divided into three lots, which, according to the terms of the contract, must all be worked. These three lots, going from west to east, are Nagotna, Hatou and Campha, this latter lot having been surveyed, though there is not sufficient protection against pirates

It would be too long and too difficult for one so little acquainted with the technicality of the work to enter into any detail of what is being done, but I may mention that three seams have been put into working order, and that they have received the names of Bavier, Chater, and Marmottan. They are, upon the average, 23 feet deep and at an angle of 80 degrees. The galleries, with beams to prop them up, are about 7 feet high by 10 feet broad, with ventilating shafts at intervals of 130 feet. The Chater gallery has been driven to a distance of five furlongs in eighteen months, the rate of progress being from 90 to 93 feet a month. The calculations based upon the parallelism of the strata give a depth of at least 816 feet. The working of the galleries is conducted in such a way as to prevent the fissures from being complete and to avoid the dangers of fire breaking out. There has not, so far, been any fire-damp, whereas at Kébao there has been some. There is, moreover, very little water, and even in the galleries, which are nearly 50 feet below the level of the sea, a steam pump suffices to get rid of it all in two hours.

The beams used for propping up the galleries cost about a penny for three feet, and the works are supervised by a French engineer, who lives close to the mine and sends in a daily report to M. Durrant, coming in to Hong-Hay every Saturday evening and spending Sunday with him.

The engineers are left to choose their own workmen, and they prefer the Annamites, who, they say, are more tractable and easier to manage than the Chinese. The Annamite is paid a franc a day, from

does not do more than a quarter of the work of a European, the cost of labour is as high as it is in France. The Annamite gangers get about a shilling per day of ten hours. There is some work done at night, but Sunday is a day of rest. Upon the day of our visit 160 tons had been extracted, but the average is about ten tons less. When I add that the total production of Nagotna alone is estimated at 40 million tons, it will be seen that there is plenty of work still in hand. Upon the following day we went to see Hatou. The railway, ten miles in length, which, as I have already said, is being constructed, will not be finished for six months. In order to reach the mine, we go first in a steam launch through the bay of Fitz-along, and thence in a canoe, which in some places has to be pushed through the water, the last part of the journey being in a small cart drawn by buffaloes. The country is a very picturesque one, for we are in the brush, and beyond are hills the summits of which are covered with forests which have so far escaped being burnt.

These forests are peopled with game of all kinds: deer, wild boar, bears and tigers, and there is a fine field here for the naturalist as well as the sportsman; the fauna of the Bay of Halong is a very interesting subject of study. I am told that in certain islets there are rock antelopes of the nemorhadus species, such as M. Bonvalot and myself came across during our travels in Thibet. In the island of Cac-Ba there are, as I am assured, large monkeys with a tuft of hair upon their heads, which make them look like clowns. The mouths of the rivers and the small sandy creeks are the resort of enormous tortoises,

which come to bury their eggs in them and take care not to return by the same way, in order that their hiding-place may not be discovered. All this makes me feel very much inclined to remain here longer, but time presses, and I am obliged to devote what remains to an inspection of the coal-fields.

The Hatou coal is extracted from the surface, like stone from a quarry, the thickness of the seams—one about 220 feet, the other about 35—and their contiguity to the surface rendering this possible. Two sides of the hill have been opened up in this way and look from a distance like gigantic staircases. In short, the work consists in reversing the mountain, and the danger of fire, which would arise from the great strain placed upon the lower shafts, is entirely done away with. Moreover, the thickest of the two seams is intersected by beds of schist, and whereas it would be difficult in a mine to avoid these, the system adopted makes it easy to dig above or below them. Moreover, the coal can be removed as soon as it has been extracted, and the despatch of the trucks and communication with the central railway have been facilitated by means of inclined planes, tunnels in the rock (one of which is 520 feet long), and embankments. Several thousand tons have already been extracted, and it is calculated that in a near future the output will be 300 tons a day.

Before returning to Hong-Hay we make the ascent to the small military post which has recently been established here, from which there is a splendid view, and in the distance we see the ruins of the few huts composing the village of Hatou, which the pirates had burnt a month previously.

Upon our return to Hong-Hay, M. Durrant took us over the various establishments, the construction of which is necessitated by a large enterprise such as his : the telegraph which connects with Haïphong, the telephone to the different places on the works, the offices, the covered-in pay-box, to which the Annamites come for their wages like railway travellers going to take a ticket, the map and chart-room, and the club to which all the Europeans belong, this latter being well provided with newspapers and a billiard-room. Beyond these buildings is the street of the shops, all kept by Chinese of course, and further still the Annamite town with its small Cañhas. It is divided into two parts by a large square, as a precaution against fire. A small pond acts as a sewer, the raising of a sluice serving to carry off the rubbish and filth into the open sea, while the rest of the detritus is conveyed at night in sampans to Port Courbet, where it is put into a pit and burnt.

In a few months time, the new and growing town will be provided with the electric light, and as the motive power is already at hand, the only expense will be the purchase and fitting up of the machinery, and at the present time the fifty-eight oil-lamps cost nearly ten shillings a day.

It is not always an easy matter to administer the native town, as while it is necessary to expel the good-for-nothing characters who take refuge there, it is not possible to address a complaint to the resident at Quan-Yen without some specific motive, so that there must be a certain degree of arbitrary conduct. M. Durrant had thought of applying for a mandarin, but the latter

between two evils it was necessary to choose the lesser.

Another difficulty arises from the engagement of coolies, as they may be summoned at any moment for task-work in their villages, and there is a risk of being short of hands just when they are most needed. This drawback might be obviated by creating a village at Hofig-Hay, the inhabitants of which would be registered for task-work. These few instances will serve to show what a variety of fresh questions arise each day, the solution of which can only be left to time and experience. They are, however, mere questions of detail, and do not in the least affect the magnitude of the enterprise which, in four years, with an outlay of £240,000 and by dint of indomitable energy, has reached the pitch of prosperity at which we already find it.

THE KÉBAO COAL-FIELDS.—An afternoon spent at Kébao does not admit of much being said; but I must just refer to an enterprise which, though small, is essentially French, and which is being worked by French capital. It has been started much more recently than that at Hong-Hay, and much less money has been spent upon it, so that the work is not nearly so advanced.

The journey there takes not quite five hours through the archipelago of Fitz-along, which is quite equal, in regard to grandeur and majesty, to that of Along. Our sloop is under the charge of an old French pilot, well known at Haïphong and wearing a decoration bestowed on him by the late Admiral Courbet, whose familiarity with these waters has enabled him to be of great service. He has been twenty-five years in Cochin-

China, so that he knows every nook and corner of the coast quite as well as the pirates, whom he has often circumvented. A good pilot is indispensable for vessels of a certain tonnage, for the depth of water varies very much, and navigation is often very difficult.

Upon arrival, we remark, as at Haïphong, a few white houses upon a hill of some altitude. The jetty is not yet finished, nor has the railway been made. The houses are of iron, and the cost of one with two storeys is about 2,000 piastres.

A hearty welcome is given us by the chief engineer, M. Portal, at whose house I make the acquaintance of M. Georges Vlavéanos, who has just brought the sloop *Dupuis* back from Hong-Kong. His career has been a most extraordinary one. Having arrived at Bombay in 1857 on board a British vessel, he fought against the rebels, and having come from India to China, he took part in the campaign in 1860. He afterwards commanded the Chinese troops against the Taepings, and at Singang-Fou he met M. Dupuis going all by himself into Yunnan. Last of all, we find him in command of the "Yellow Flags" in Tonkin.

We are in the very heart of the land of adventure, and, to render the picture all the more complete, an aged Annamite with a bronzed and wizened face, wrinkled like a piece of parchment, insists upon telling us his history. Chief of the boatmen in the service of the Kébao Company, he has recently been captured by pirates, and it was only after he had been four days without food that he managed to escape by swimming. His captors, he tells us, were commanded

by a woman, wearing a red turban, which he evidently regards as very poetical, and we leave him to go and get some food while we are inspecting the mines.

The country is more hilly and picturesque than at Hong-Hay, blue mountain torrents tumbling down through deep ravines, with tall, overhanging rocks, while on the hills are gnarled trees with delicate foliage and green glades reminding one of Japan.

There are two coal-workings in progress, one, about a mile from the coast, being that of Kébao, while the other, more than double the distance, is that of Kaïdaï. The railway is not yet made, and the coal is conveyed in barges (which can load 200 tons at low water) from the pit to the sea. The shaft is 250 feet deep, of which three-fourths were sunk in six months, with a diameter of 13 feet. All the workmen employed here are Chinese, and they are paid at the rate of 50 piastres for each mètre sunk, including the timber for lining the sides. The timber is kept in its place by means of iron clamps, and the stonework and masonry will follow.

The cable which raises the connecting rods rests upon transversal iron beams upon two brick pillars, and it is worked by steam. There are not more than seven cubic feet of water per hour in the bottom of the mine. Beyond the shaft, there is an inclined plane, about 660 feet long (or a third of that depth), and two seams are being worked, one about 40 inches thick, the other nearly double. A building is being erected for the machinery above the shaft, the brick and lime being made at Kébao,

while the fire-bricks come from Scotland by way of Hong-Kong.

Below the shaft, a quay is being constructed, where there will be from thirteen to sixteen feet of water at low tide. The two sides of the ravine are connected by a bridge upon piles nearly 100 feet long, and another bridge of a similar kind will enable the railway from Kaïdaï to reach this point. This second working is done in covered galleries, and safety-lamps are employed on account of the fire-damp.

In the near future, a railway eight miles long, with a gauge of 40 inches in lieu of the present line of 24 inches, will connect these workings with a place on the coast of Kébao, where a port can be opened in deep water. Moreover, apart from the income of the mines, the necessities of revictualling for the marine force and the strategical position of this port cannot fail to make it a very important one.

The Pirate Islands and the Green Island, at the entrance of the bay, can easily be fortified, and if the French administration ever decides to construct practical railways or to guarantee a fixed interest to companies willing to do so, one of the first will, no doubt, be that connecting Tien-Yen, at the extremity of the gulf, to Haïphong or Hanoï, in which case the importance of the new port would be increased tenfold. M. Portal proposes to turn the land to a profit by cultivation as well. Several of the valleys are very fertile, and they will supply rice for the coolies, and hemp for rope-making, while castor oil will probably supersede pitch and tar in the manufacture of coal-bricks, experiments having already been made in regard to this. The fine forests in the island can-

not but be of service, and, with resources of all kinds abundant, all that is wanted is to make a good use of them.

We spent several hours at Kébao, and from what little I was able to see and hear, I believe that it is an enterprise well commenced, which is destined to yield good results.

It is not so far advanced as Hong-Hay, but the concession is of the same extent; the coal seems to be of much the same kind, but if at the present time there is perhaps rather less dust at Kébao than at Hong-Hay, the quality seems to be rather inferior, there being more schist in it. The two enterprises have each their system for the delivery of coal, for while Hong-Hay will send its coal to Hong-Kong on vessels loaded at its quays, the Kébao coal will rather be sent in barges to Haïphong, where vessels will take it over for burning and for freight. Some of the coal, however, is sold to go to Canton and Siam, and a contract has been signed with an English firm in Siam to supply them with 30,000 tons a year. Kébao coal is selling for fivepence a ton less than Hong-Hay, and the navy, it may be added, uses both. It would be imprudent to offer an opinion as to the future of the two workings, all that I can say being that that at Hong-Hay has been carried out upon a larger scale and a bigger capital than that of Kébao, but I do not think that they are destined to become rivals; there is room, and to spare, for all. Far from being in each other's way, they ought to be of mutual help, and thus their joint efforts and prosperity, while enriching Tonkin, will contribute in no small measure to bring about a complete change of opinion

at home with regard to one of the finest of our colonies.[1]

[1] It is impossible to estimate the importance of the Tonkin coal-fields, as it is not known where they begin, and where they end. The strata no doubt traverse the whole country; for, having been discovered in the island of Haïnam, and worked at Kébao and Hong-Hay, as well as at several places in the Dong-Trieu, they appear again at the upper part of the Red River, where seams were discovered between Yen-Baï and Lao-Kaï. Several pits were opened there, and the coal taken from them and used in war-ships gave great satisfaction, for, though only surface coal, it is lighted easily and burns well. These seams running parallel with the upper reaches of the river may have a great future before them, as they secure a freight for the junks going up with goods, while they will facilitate steam navigation by obviating the necessity for artificial coal depots. The cotton trade may also be benefited by it, as spinning factories would have abundance of combustible ready to hand. It is difficult to speak with much assurance, but I thought it well to mention the recent discovery and point out some of the advantages which might be derived from it, because, let me repeat, coal is one of the essential conditions of the industrial development of Tonkin.

# CHAPTER III

The Start from Haïphong—Going up the Red River—Hong Yen —Hanoï—Description of the Town (the Concession)—Rue Paul Bert—The Lake —The Market—The Citadel—Stay at Hanoï—Inquiry into the Present Condition of Tonkin—The Bright Side; Mines, Cultivation, Industry, Commerce, Roads, Langson Railway—The Dark Side; Piracy, the Administrative System, Finance, wretched state of the Troops—Conclusion.

On returning to Haïphong, we merely spend the night there, joining the boat at the Messageries Fluviales the next morning for Hanoï. The voyage up the river occupies fourteen hours, the navigation being difficult, especially in the Canal des Bambous, which connects the Cua-Cam and the Red River, the bends being very frequent and the steamer having only just room to turn. Two natives, one to starboard and the other to larboard, sound the river with long bamboos, which they pull out at intervals to see what the depth of water is. As we went up, our steamer just touched the bottom, but we were not stopped, more fortunate in this than the steamer which we passed going down, as she was delayed for several hours.

The scenery is monotonous, as we are in the midst of the delta, with nothing but water as far as the eye

can reach, excepting a few clumps of palm-trees or bamboos which form a curtain as it were to some village. The dykes, which require great labour to maintain them in repair, keep back the waters, so that part of the land remains unproductive. We are told that an effort is to be made to raise the level by mud deposits, in which case an experiment might be made, upon a small scale, of the project of M. Alavoil, who is the engineer at the head of the service in Hanoï. He proposes to intersect, from the upper delta to the sea, all the dykes at the points where the rivers or their affluents flow through marshy land. By letting only a thin stream of water pass, the villages situated upon the higher lands would not be inundated, and an alluvial deposit would be lodged each year upon the low-lying ground, $7\frac{1}{2}$ millions acres now unproductive being thus fertilised. The proposal is one which well deserves being explained, recalling as it does the work which the Nile has accomplished every year in Egypt for so many centuries.

Beyond the monotonous plain, there is visible to the left a natural elevation which the eye has been able to distinguish during nearly all the journey from Hanoï to Haïphong, this being the Elephant Mountain, so named on account of its shape.

One gets tired of contemplating this dome, always the same, and always, apparently, as far off as ever. There is more variety in the spectacle to be seen on the banks of the river, with the gray or pink buffaloes walking slowly along or stopping to watch the steamer with an air of stupid indifference, and the little boys running along and executing all sorts of contortions in the hope of getting a few pieces of money thrown to

them, or putting their hands to their mouths as much as to say that they are hungry. These bronzed little creatures, naked from head to foot, with their protuberant stomachs and thin legs, always remind me of the gnomes and elves of fairy tales.

Half-way up the river, to the right, is a large village, which may almost be called a town. This is Hong-Yen, and all that we have time to see in a quarter of an hour are a few white houses, a residence which has been repaired and to which are attached two tigers (in plaster) as guardians, the post-office and an inn. The jetty has been placed against a sand bank, and the river has been gradually eating into the bank for many years. But nothing has been done to arrest this process, as the Residents change too frequently to venture upon any work of importance, the average being about five in a year. Fortunately the district is very quiet. From Hong-Yen to Hanoï, where we arrive late at night, there is no other village of importance.

Founded in the eighth century by a Chinese mandarin, Hanoï is officially styled Tham-lang-Tham (the City of the Red Dragon). It is also called Kecho (the Great Market), Bac-Thanh (Citadel of the North), and Dong-Kink (Capital of the East).

The territory of the town itself, which has over 100,000 inhabitants, is in the shape of a triangle, two sides of which are formed by the bank of the Red River and by the citadel, which almost meet at right angles.

On landing, the passenger at once finds himself upon the Concession, as the land originally ceded to France by the treaty of 1874 is called. In place of

a consulate, this land is now the site of the residences of the Governor-General, the general in command of the troops, the staff, and the admiral, all of them facing the river and being in the midst of very large gardens, while the military buildings and the barracks give this tract of land the appearance of being the suburb of a town.

A road running parallel with the marshes through lands which have not been built over, leads in the course of a few hundred yards, to the Rue Paul Bert, which is the centre of the French quarter. This street is the axis around which the colonists and functionaries gravitate, it being here that they live and move and have their being.

When we Frenchmen colonise, we often manifest great inexperience and want of foresight; but side by side with these defects are certain good qualities which we carry with us all over the globe. In the first place, we have a knack of clearing a native town and of constructing by the side of it something at once clean and elegant, utilising the smallest detail so as to make the whole effect pleasing to the eye. The good taste of the Montmartre grisette is to be traced in the work of the Californian pioneer and the Cochin-China non-commissioned officer, that subtle and intangible something which is derived from our temperament and is of our very essence accounting for the fact that, at a small outlay in money, we have cleared out and partially reconstructed two of the most beautiful towns in the Far East, Hanoï and Saïgon. Compare them with the English-built towns of Bombay and Calcutta in India, or of Hong-Kong in China, and you will find in the latter large and

massive buildings, denoting force and power, but heavy; whereas in the French-built towns there is always some little resemblance to Paris. Take for instance, the Rue Paul Bert, with its rows of white houses, two or three storeys high, its elegant shops with *cafés* on the ground floor, and the trees on the pavement, their green foliage standing out against the whiteness of the houses, and with its moving crowds of officers, civil functionaries, and natives. The pousse-pousse is the ordinary mode of locomotion, and it moves along at a very good pace; but carriages are also used, though only by the higher functionaries, the representatives of the banking-houses or the opium monopoly, and the rich colonists, if such an adjective may be used in a country where there is everything except capital. The carriages generally used are light victorias, drawn by two small horses of the country, which seem as if they had been made to match in size the native coachman or groom. There is also the *mababan*, which is something like a coffin on four wheels. This is the vehicle peculiar to the extreme East, from India to China, and as it stops, followed by Annamites riding horses with European saddles, there gets out a native, whose clothes are little if any more elaborate than those of his followers, but upon his breast are the insignia of Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. Taller than his escort, he is of the pale complexion which in this country denotes the aristocracy, with an intelligent but hard face, the line on the forehead indicating the depth of thought in which he indulges. His mouth, round the corners of which are a few of

can open in a smile which he means to be amiable, and he has a way of putting out his two hands, which are small, delicate, and white as those of a woman. Intelligence, tenacity and suppleness, such are the chief characteristics of Kinh-Luoc, representative in Tonquin of H.M. the Emperor of Annam. He is an old acquaintance of mine, for in 1890 he conferred upon me the Kin-Kam, a native decoration the insignia being a triangle of copper, gold or jade, according to the grade, which is worn round the neck hung upon a silk thread.

A hundred yards or so beyond the principal *café*, on the right side of the street, opens a large square, very bright, with plenty of flowers and shady trees, having a large building upon each side which is reserved for the higher officials. This is the Place du Gouvernement, in the centre of which is a kiosk where a military band plays on Thursday and Sunday. Here, too, is a bronze statue representing Paul Bert leaning upon an Annamite, and contemplating the lake which lies at his feet, and the £160 which this monument cost was nearly made up of small subscriptions collected in Indo-China. The islet with its small pagoda, the primitive wooden bridge thrown across it, the Place du Gouvernement with its buildings upon one side, the low houses, with their leaning roofs, of the native town beyond, and upon the other side the foliage amid which the bank of Indo-China is hidden and above which rise the towers of Monseigneur Pugenier's Cathedral, all contribute to make of Hanoï one of the brightest, prettiest and most picturesque cities of the far East, while the road which runs round it forms a promenade much appreciated by

the Europeans. The lake awakens recollections greatly prized by the Annamites, those of the independence which they won by their victory over the Chinese. The legend attaching to the lake of the great sword (hoam-Kiem-he) is that in 1418, when Annam was under the Chinese yoke, a fisherman, Lé-loi, having cast his nets into the lake, drew out a long sword. Taking this to be a presage from heaven, he got up a rising against the Chinese, who, after ten years' struggle, abandoned Annam. The liberator, having been crowned king by his companions, decided that a sacrifice should be made to thank the gods for their goodness. The preparations for this sacrifice having been completed, the sword which had guided them to victory was carried with great pomp to the shore, but the ceremony had barely begun when the sword leapt from its scabbard and changed into a dragon, which at once leapt in the water and was seen no more.

This was at once recognised to be the genius of the lake and a pagoda was built in his honour.

The lake may be said to form the boundary of the native town, which lies between the citadel and the river. The Annamites build like the Chinese and arrange their shops in the same way, while they have streets occupied by particular trades. In front of the shops are large red placards, with names in gold letters and Chinese characters, but the streets are broader and more spacious, so that, despite the density of the population, there is no difficulty in getting about in a pousse-pousse. Upon market days, the crowd is very great and the spectacle a curious one, and long files of women go by carrying their goods

in baskets suspended to the two ends of a bamboo which rests on the shoulders. They wear turbans, and most of them are attired in long smocks, while others wear pantaloons, which, it is said, Minh-Mang ordered to be worn in order to check the licentiousness which prevailed. This edict was so untimely that it led to a bloody revolt. Jealous of their rights and their mode of dress, the Annamite women have very distinct characteristices, and it is only with them that one sees the indolent carriage which they affect, with their thighs outstretched and their haunches moving as in the dance. This natural attitude, due in the main to their conformation, is perhaps one of the most marked characteristics of the race of the Giao-Chi, which is quite distinct from the Chinese. They have good busts, and the face would often be pleasing if they could hide the mouth; but the new-comer is horrified to see their thick, swollen and split lips open and display a cavity with black teeth, often very decayed, and what looks like bloody saliva. Still more surprised is he when this cavity opens to let drop into the mouth of two or three children some half-masticated rice. Yet there is nothing but what is natural in all this. The black is due to the habit of lacquering the teeth and the red to the chewing of the betel-nut, while as to masticating the children's food in advance, I have heard the doctors say that it is a very good plan. After a few months' time, one grows accustomed to anything, and as these Annamite ladies put up with our white teeth—dog's teeth, as they call them—I hope they will excuse my remarks.

After having seen the market, we must go and

have a look at the citadel, which is a square building with high, gray walls, the foundation of which goes down to a deep moat, now partly dried up. It is more than half a mile in length, and it is easy to see by the shape (the Vauban system) and the style of building that it is not the sole work of Asiatics; and, as a matter of fact, it was built in the last century, under the supervision and after the plans of Colonel Olivier, who was sent out to Nguyen after the signature of the treaty between France and Annam. Of French origin, this fortress was destined a century later to become the theatre of exploits so extraordinary upon the part of a handful of Frenchmen, led by two heroes, that they seem to belong rather to the domain of romance. I refer, of course, to the capture of the citadel of Hanoï in 1873, by Garnier and Dupuis, at the head of two hundred men. In building these walls, Olivier little dreamt that a Frenchman would be called upon to raze them, though Commandant Rivière's work of demolition was never completed, and they have since been rebuilt. There is some intention, I believe, of entirely demolishing the fortress in order to give more space to the Annamite town.

Beyond the citadel there are several pagodas, notably those of the Great Buddha and of the Crows, which are well worth a visit, but my object is not to serve as a guide, but to give in a few lines a summary description of the town where I have to stay for a week—in the first place because there are still several preparations to be made for our journey, and in the second because I am anxious to gather upon the spot the different views held as to our present situation in Tonkin.

What I am about to say is the outcome of an inquiry, in the course of which information was supplied to me in abundance, as well as the embodiment of my own impressions, and of documents supplied to me from one source and another. It is difficult to embody in a few pages what would fill volumes, and all that I can hope to do is to summarize the opinions of those who seemed to me the most competent to form one, and to point out what has been done, what left undone, and what might still be carried out in Tonkin. My object is to put my finger upon what is defective as well as upon what is good, without prejudice or false pride, and to hold the sores which I have encountered up to the light of day, as a surgeon would do, in order to ascertain their cause and discern the proper mode of treatment. I am not afraid of my sincerity of motive being called in question, but before commencing what I have to say, it is incumbent upon me to thank those who have assisted me in the work and helped me, in consideration of the object in view, to get at the truth.

I would fain take this opportunity of saying to all the Frenchmen, whom I met in Tonkin, officials, soldiers, colonists, and journalists, how much indebted I am for their treatment of me. They received me as an ordinary traveller, as a comrade desirous of lending them what little help he could by advocating with his pen the good cause which they had all embraced, without distinction of party, that is to say the extension of the French dominions beyond the ocean.

## MINES.

Apart from the honour of the flag, the inducement first held out to our representatives to convince them of the necessity of conquering Tonkin, the most tangible was beyond question the profit to be derived from the mines. The figures were there to prove that the gold mines already being worked paid the Emperor of Annam nearly £40 of annual dues, and that although the method of working was very primitive, several large nuggets were being found. Some of these were exhibited in France, perhaps with the hope of raising the "gold fever," which was the starting point of the colonization of two of the richest countries in the world, California and Australia. But these illusions are now dispelled, for that which was expected to impress the popular imagination has dwindled into insignificance, and it is seen that, in respect to the bringing out the wealth of the colony, the mine question is no longer the sole, perhaps not even the most important one. Not but what many concessions for minerals have not been applied for and granted, but the holders of them are keeping them in reserve, being checked by the lack of capital and the insecurity, two causes of delay in the development of the country, to which I shall have often need to refer.

I have already referred to the coal-fields of Hong-Hay and Kébao, and have mentioned that the seams extend as far as the Yunnan. A company is being formed to work them at Quang-Yen, and some twenty other concessions have been granted upon the banks

of the river between Yen-Baï and Laokay. They, too, will soon be commenced, and what with the trade with Yunnan and the cultivation of cotton, which may lead to the erection of factories, their importance will be increased to no small degree.

Apart from the coal-fields, there are not, so far, any important mineral workings, though a few seams of antimony yield a metal the price of which has increased since it has been introduced into the composition of bullets. Close to the sea and to depots of chlorate of sodium, sulphate of antimony might, perhaps, be utilized to greater advantage in a manufactory of soap, candles and other like products, for sulphuric acid might be extracted from it, and a factory of this kind would probably realize large profits upon the Chinese coast, but a considerable capital would be required to wash it.

The silver mines paid the Hué treasury an annual tribute of over £120, and among them may be mentioned the Ngan-Son (Silver Mountain) in the province of Cao-Bang, not far from Lake Babć. Conceded in 1889 to MM. de Saint Mathurin and Bédat, and christened the Lucie mine, it was worked by them and provided with European machinery, but the lack of roads and the insecurity have, unfortunately, made it very doubtful whether it will pay. Formerly the Chinese worked in this mine, and they number many very good miners, who, though devoid of scientific principles, have become, by dint of experience, very skilful in the difficult operation known as "compellation," success in which involves a "handiness" which they possess in an eminent degree. The owner of the mine was in the habit of reserving six-sevenths of the

silver for himself and giving the other seventh to his workmen.

The abundance of the gold-bearing sands has been much exaggerated, as I shall have occasion to show, and concessions which have been obtained by Europeans, notably around Myduc in the province of Hanoï, seem likely to be restricted to Chinese.

The copper mines, which are very abundant and rich in Tonkin, yielded to the treasury a sum of about £60, by way of tribute, while the iron works were taxed at 6,000 lbs. weight of that metal, or about £48 in value, the information gathered by the missionaries and travellers, as well as that derived from the documents taken at Hanoï in 1882, show that other metals have been and still might be extracted, such as tin, zinc, lead, bismuth and arsenic.

Nor does the mineral wealth of the country end here, for marble is being worked successfully at Kécheu by two brothers, very sturdy colonists, whose example may be commended to the notice of workmen of small means who may be thinking of coming out to the colony, prepared to devote all their energies to the service which they undertake.

Traces of petroleum and naphtha oil have been discovered in the east, but the region in which they are situated is still very difficult to explore, and when it is remembered that, despite the yield of the Burmah oil wells, casks of petroleum are sent all the way from Batoum to Siam, it is easy to understand of what importance the discovery of this oil would be for French Indo-China.

The salt industry was at one time prosperous upon

and Quang-Si, for which countries it could be purchased at a lower price than the produce of the Setchuen salt mines. By clause 15 of the Pekin Treaty of 1886 (signed by M. de Cogordan), the export of salt to China was forbidden us, and this clause, prompted by the solicitations of the Anglo-Chinese Customs, was very prejudicial to our trade, as Mr. Bourne was careful to point out in the interesting narrative of his journey into the Yunnan.

## CULTIVATION.

Although the many mines of Tonkin will some day no doubt be a source of great wealth for the colonists, I do not imagine that they will be the first source of wealth, this being more probably the attribute of the soil. This, which is of much the same composition as that from which millions of Chinese derive their living, is very productive, and may be made more so, when embankment works, well regulated systems of irrigation, the making of roads, and a feeling of security, enable the inhabitants to extend their cultivation. The Bay-Saï road had hardly been finished before the natives applied for concessions in the district which it traverses, and, in addition to the native crops, experiments will be made on others. Nor will these be confined to the delta, as upon the table-lands of the mountain-district the conditions of altitude and climate will be found very favourable to the development of certain plants.

Rice, in all its varieties, grows in the lowlands and highlands, feeding the whole of Indo-China, as it does half the universe, and "a rice field, a tuft of bamboo,

and a buffalo" would unquestionably be the socialistic programme for Asia if its inhabitants were to be won over by glib talk, instead of being firmly convinced that the strong will continue to rob the weak as long as the world lasts. The crops are less abundant than in Cochin-China, and yet in some years, such as 1891, Tonkin has a surplus stock of rice to dispose of. The sugar-cane and maize are also cultivated in the north together with cinnamon, the bamboo, the cocoa-tree, the mulberry, the betel-nut, indigo, the castor-bean, etc.

The areca-nut requires comparatively little attention, and it is a good plant to cultivate, assuring an annual return and enabling the grower to make experiments in cultivating other plants which will not yield a profit for some years if at all. Among these latter let me mention manilla jute and hemp, both these plants, which yield a rich return in the Philippine Islands, having recently been tried in some land upon the left banks of the Red River conceded to Messrs. Gobert.

Cotton is destined, in my opinion, to be the great source of wealth in Tonkin, and there will be no difficulty in sending it in its raw state to the Yunnan, Quang-Si, and even as far as Setchuen. If the figures given by Mr. Bourne and by the French Consul at Mung-Tsé, upon the cotton trade in the Chinese provinces which border on the French colony, are carefully considered, and if account be taken of the cost of transport by caravan of a bale from Burmah or the Laos into the Chinese towns, it will be easy to see what an enormous profit we may make by exporting

one is made. But I will revert to this subject when dealing with the commercial outlets of Tonkin.

Some of the cotton will, perhaps, be manufactured in the colony, while the rest is exported raw, and there is no reason why the cotton-spinning factories of Tonkin should not become very important. Take, for instance, India, where cotton is grown and spun, the materials thus made being sent as far as China, though the manufacturers have to use coal, which is very expensive, seeing that it comes all the way from England or Japan. Yet in Tonkin we have both the raw material and the combustible, and there can be no reason why the cotton factories should not be built in districts where the coal abounds. The companies which have obtained concessions for working the coal are, therefore, in every way interested in creating at the same time agricultural establishments. This combination seems to be understood by many of the colonists, and M. Marty, among others, is about to establish a large cotton factory in the neighbourhood of Yen Bay.

The climate is admirably adapted to the cotton-plant, and in the Thanhoa and Bay-Saï districts it attains full growth in four months, while upon the high tablelands the Muongs sow it and leave it to grow without any further attention, gathering it when ripe as they require it.

Experiments with plants from Georgia have been made near Hanoï by an Anglo-French company, and the unsatisfactory results thus far obtained may be due to bad management and the lack of proper preparation.

The failure of a concession obtained by M. Bour-

going-Meiffre, on the banks of the Black River, which was ravaged by pirates before the crop was ripe, was mainly due to the conditions on which it was granted, the Government having been imprudent in taking from the natives, to cede it to Frenchmen, the long strip of cultivated land along the river bank, the former having their revenge for this in the way described. To whatever cause they may be ascribed, these first failures need not discourage the colonists. If they look at the Indian plantations, or, to go much further, those which the Russians, by dint of persevering efforts and energy, have formed beyond the deserts of Bokhara, around Tashkend, they will find that these plantations yield a return of 40 per cent., so that we may have full confidence in the future of cotton in Tonkin.

Another textile plant destined to give very good results, is the white or Chinese nettle, which grows wild in Tonkin, the roots lasting for twenty years. There are several large plantations of it near Calcutta, and there is a market for it at Liverpool, all that is required being to simplify and improve the method of decortication. Tea grows upon the hill-sides of Sontay and in other localities above the delta, but in order to make it pay we must alter the mode of cultivation, of gathering and preparing the leaves, for the produce, as it now is, cannot compare with the excellent tea which the Chinese send into the district of Ibang, which is contiguous to Tonkin. What we ought to do is to secure the services of some of their workmen to initiate the Annamites into their methods, in which case there is no reason why Tonkin should not be for Indo-China what Ceylon is for India.

Here, too, as in Ceylon, coffee should occupy an important place. Ten years ago, out of the 60,000 tons of coffee grown, Brazil produced half, and the West Indies a sixth. A learned botanist and observer, M. Balansa, has stated that from a climatic point of view Annam and Tonkin approach the most nearly to Brazil, so that we ought to take a very prominent position in the coffee markets of the world. The Siberian plants seem to be the most liked and the hardiest, while there is less to fear now from the *Hemileia vastatrix*. The coffee plant ought to do well in the highlands, and experiments have already been made upon a very small scale, some of the plants distributed to the chiefs growing strong and healthy, as I have seen with my own eyes. A cultivation of more than 10,000 coffee plants has been entered upon at Kécheu, not far from Hanoï, and so far it has answered very well.

This is a convenient opportunity for saying a few words about the Frenchmen who have commenced the experiments—two of them, the brothers Guillaume, plain peasants by birth, very energetic and hard-working, after completing their period of military service in Tonkin, settled in the country, their first venture being the working of a marble quarry, in connection with which they learned to draw and copy models.

With the profits derived from this they purchased some ewes, and made with their milk the cheese which is so much appreciated in Tonkin, and they are now owners of extensive plantations. While one of them is at Hanoï, the other remains to superintend the works. The fact that they do not haunt the

cafés and bars tells much in their favour, and their example proves that there is an opening in Tonkin for every one, even if he has little capital, provided that he is willing to work.

To be done with the matter of cultivation, there is the tobacco plant, which, to judge by the products of the Dutch Indies, might become a source of great profit for Upper Tonkin. Opium does very well, but the institution of the farming-out system makes the cultivation less profitable than it might be, while upon the other hand the business transactions with the bordering provinces of China were settled in Tonkin opium, which was very valuable and went into a very small compass. The treaty by which we are prevented from exporting salt also prohibits that of opium, and our neighbours were well advised when they brought forward these clauses, in order to place difficulties in the way of our commercial relations with them by way of Tonkin.

In order to assist agriculture, the Government has formed an experimental garden in the neighbourhood of Hanoï, and the manager has made the very utmost of the limited resources at his disposal. The colonist is sure of finding the plants he first requires at a very cheap rate, and many plants are sent to different parts to be experimented upon. These efforts to introduce and to acclimatize plants hitherto unknown in the country had already been tried by the much-regretted Monseigneur Pugenier, whose immense agricultural establishment at Kécheu may well serve as a type and pattern for the European colonist.

There is one weak point in the conditions which

the Government imposes for the concessions granted. These conditions, as laid down in the official decree of February, 1888, are as under :—

1. Deposit of a franc per hectare (about 4d. per acre) of land conceded, the concession being for five years ;

2. Undertaking to cultivate the land within five years ;

3. Payment of taxes upon the portions cultivated after the third year ;

4. Renewal of the concession by periods of thirty years, if at the expiration of the fifth year the above conditions have been complied with ; withdrawal, in the contrary event, of the portions not put into cultivation.

But M. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, studying the history of the colonization of Australia and America, points out that the *régime* of full ownership and liberty is preferable to these concessions, and shows how in Algeria lands which people refused to take as concessions in 1888 have, when put up to public sale, fetched high prices.

Notwithstanding the mistakes which have been made, we still have countless agricultural resources to avail ourselves of, and, to show what the Dutch have done in conditions scarcely more favourable, let me quote the following extract from a planter who, after having spent several years in Sumatra, has been visiting Tonkin :—

"The most striking instance of the extent to which a colony well provided with capital can develop is Sumatra, where I have worked for many years.

"In 1866, a Dutchman, Heer Niewenhuis, settled

there to plant tobacco upon the eastern coast of the island at Deli, and in that year he sent home 165 bales of tobacco, which were sold at Amsterdam for about 25,000 florins. The tobacco was considered to be exceptionally good, and in 1867–1869 several companies were formed to obtain large concessions of land from the Government and to plant tobacco. The enterprise has since prospered to such an extent that in 1889 the quantity of tobacco sent from Deli to Europe, principally to Amsterdam, was over 300,000 bales, representing a total value of over £3,200,000, and this from a small strip of territory situated between the Langkat river to the north and the Batu-Barra river to the south, that is to say about 70 miles of coast by 30 in breadth, the interior remaining unexplored.

"The Government of the Dutch Indies has succeeded in attracting capital to this country by very extensive grants of land, some as much as 50,000 acres, upon very liberal terms, for seventy-five years. As the length of these grants, guaranteed by the Government, is sufficient to give full security to capital, there has been a ready flow of it, and a tract of country which a few years ago was covered with vast forests, from which the Malay natives only obtained a little gum and a few canes and poles, has been made to yield over three million pounds sterling in a year, certain companies in Holland paying their shareholders dividends of 110 and 157 per cent. This phenomenal success has since undergone a check, and the colony is at present in a very unsettled state. The planters, whose heads were in many cases turned by their rapid accession to wealth, began to increase

the quantity of their crops, forgetting that it was the light quality and delicacy of their tobacco which had caused it to sell so well; the result being that with increased quantity the quality fell, and prices also. Unless they revert to their former methods of cultivation—and that is no easy matter, for the Chinese coolie, who is paid according to the number of plants he delivers, will be disinclined to sacrifice his profits in order to ensure a higher quality, which is to him a matter of indifference—the Deli planters will not see a return of their palmy days. There are already competitors in the field, notably Borneo, but as Borneo has no native population all the labour has to be imported, and it is very inferior and very expensive. That country cannot, therefore, hope to succeed, and that was my reason for leaving it.

"This offers, if our governing authorities in Cochin China only have a little foresight, a splendid opportunity for endowing the country with an enterprise which will be the certain cause of rapid wealth, and will, above all, have the advantage of at once opening the unexplored forest region of Upper Tonkin, and preparing the way for the introduction of perennial cultivations, such as coffee, cocoa, &c. Tonkin has all that is needed for doing this; viz., agricultural labour of good quality at a reasonable rate, which would soon get to understand the methods of cultivation, an admirable network of water-ways, and a good climate by comparison with that of Borneo and Sumatra, where the destruction of the forests has led to a terrible increase of mortality. All that is needed is an influx of capital."

## INDUSTRIES.

As a general rule, the development of industry in a country follows that of agriculture and mining, so that Tonkin, being backward in regard to the two latter, is still more so in regard to the first named. Still, a few manufactures are being established, the Annamites are clever and quick at learning, wages are low, and employers are satisfied with their workmen.

Without going into many details, I may mention the match factory at Hanoï, now in full working order, and the typographic and paper-making establishment of M. Schneider, a very fine paper for newspaper-printing being made out of rice-pulp.

Then there are the undertakings of M. Bourgoing-Meiffre, a very enterprising native of Lyons, who is ably seconded by his strenuous and energetic wife, which may be held up to the notice of the newly arrived colonists. At one time he will be going to collect *badiane* at the frontier of China, running the risk of being assailed by pirates, and then he will be collecting silk, the cocoons of which are unwound by the Annamites whom he has drilled to the task, the results which he obtains being so different from those of the natives themselves that French visitors to Tonkin who have come to study the silk question can hardly believe their eyes. The belief was that the Annamites did not understand how to rear the silkworm and lost a part of the cocoon, so that there could be no opening for the silk industry in Tonkin for a long time. But the skeins which have already

been sent to France have quite confuted this theory, and though the Annamites stand in need of a few lessons from us, they are very quick to learn, and improve every year.

In addition to the silk industry, M. Bourgoing-Meiffre has a portion of the military contracts, and he supplies clothing to the sharpshooters. A contract was also concluded between him and a chief in the higher region of the country for the supply of tea, and he likewise trades in cotton. Having come over to France after getting together a small capital for this purpose, he encountered such difficulties in the purchase of the working material and the engagement of skilled workmen that he was obliged to go to England, where he at once got what he wanted. The capital, supplied half by him and half by a few large cotton spinners, amounted to about £34,000, and it was agreed that the enterprise should begin with 10,000 spindles. He might have been willing to pay £2,000 more in France than he had to do in England for the machinery, if the vendor had been willing to make reasonable conditions, but he refused to deliver it in Tonkin or to send any men out with it.

How different was the attitude of a Manchester house which has already supplied one of our large cotton-factories in France with spindles. This firm, which contracted to supply what was wanted for £24,000, sent out to Hanoï at its own cost a constructor with the iron framework, and then the material itself, accompanied by three head workmen, who are to remain in Tonkin as long as they are required to initiate the natives into the work. A third of the sum was to be paid upon the signature

of the contract, another third upon the shipping of the materials, a sixth four months after they had been set up in Hanoï, and the remainder two years afterwards.

Our own contractors, who are such slaves to routine, cannot therefore be astonished if the colonists go elsewhere for what they require in the way of machinery, but one can scarcely blame workmen for not caring to face the long voyage to Tonkin, especially as they have been prejudiced against it by people who do not scruple to sacrifice the interests of their country to those of politics, the mistrust which has been thus created being one which it will take a long time to get over. Three times in succession M. Bourgoing-Meiffre went to Nîmes to try and get five women to come out and spin the silk at Hanoï, but though he offered them very high wages and they promised to come, he had no sooner turned his back than they were induced by ignorant friends and neighbours to break their word. Despite all these difficulties, M. Bourgoing-Meiffre has given a fresh impetus to his silk factory, and he is now preparing to start a cotton factory, while he has also started large tea plantations, which are under the charge of five skilled men whom he has brought over from Ceylon.

M. Daurelle also cultivates silk; while the firm of Pila is about to open three manufactories with 600 looms. Then there are dressmaking establishments under the management of M. Charpentier, and others for the making of ice, beer, &c., while steamboats and sloops are built on the slips at Haïphong.

TRADE, ROADS, AND OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION.

Trade ought unquestionably to have already acquired much more importance than it has, but I shall have to revert more in detail hereafter to what I said about Haïphong in the previous chapter when speaking of commercial outlets. For the present I will confine myself to the means of communication, first among which is the admirable network of rivers and canals which the Messageries Fluviales Company turns to such good account. Something still remains to be done for improving the upper courses of the rivers, but even if the navigation is improved to the fullest possible extent the water transports would not suffice, roads and railways being also required. M. de Lanessan has already put into execution the scheme which he had propounded in his lectures, and in fifty days he had nearly 200 miles of roads laid. Natives were employed upon this work; and although they were given the choice of executing the labour themselves or of paying a fixed sum instead, not one in ten preferred the second alternative. These roads are thirty-six feet wide, raised above the marshes, ready to take the tramway rails when these are laid down. Though these works are distinctly useful, they have been very severely criticised, in proof of which I may quote the following letter from a very old settler in the colony:—

"I was telling you about the roads, thirty-six feet wide: nothing can be more deplorable. But that was intended to create an effect in France, and the ad-

ministration did not hesitate a moment to waste upon this useless enterprise, for 150 miles of roads already in existence, the 370,000 piastres which represented the redemption tax upon forced labour. If to this sum of £60,000 are added the dilapidations committed by the Mandarins along these roads, which are now sinking into the morasses and rice-fields, to say nothing of the loss sustained by the natives, whose property was taken without any sort of compensation, you can guess what the work has cost per mile, both to us and them."

This, in my view, is too pessimist an estimate of the situation, a remark which also applies to the objection that these new roads facilitate the circulation of pirates. Defective as they may be, these roads must, it seems to me, be of service to cultivation and trade, and, therefore, in the long run to the pacification of the country.

I was invited to the opening of the Haid-Zuong route, which starts from the left bank of the river, just above Hanoï. Only recently finished, the road seems a good one, though it has not yet been put to the test of the summer rains. The district it traverses is one of lonely morasses, which in a year's time will be replaced by fertile rice fields—a result which has already been obtained between Phulang-Tuang and Kep. From a military point of view these roads are of more service to our troops than to the pirates, who naturally prefer to see the military posts isolated from one another, narrow and steep footpaths, known only to the natives, answering the purpose of those who indulge in guerilla warfare, better than open roads, along which it is not necessary to

advance in Indian file. With these new roads, the pirates are deprived of a great part of their advantages, the route, now completed, from Tien-Yen to Langson, which traverses the eastern region of Tonkin, parallel to the open frontier of China, being of great strategic importance.

The system of 36-feet roads, upon which a tramway might be laid at any given time, is unquestionably a step forward, though far from being perfection. Railways are preferable, and the English have set us a very good example in this respect. Upper Burmah was occupied by them in 1885, and in 1887 there was a railway to Mandalay, while despite the competition of the easy navigation of the Irawaddy, it soon brought in more profits than any one of the Indian railways. In Tonkin only one railway[1] has as yet been decided upon, this being one to connect Phulang-Tuong to Langson and the frontier of China, the strategical and commercial importance of which will be referred to hereafter. I do not wish to indulge in personalities or discuss special methods of construction, but as it is well that the public should know how an enterprise, which is one of general interest, has been entered upon and conducted, a few facts may be stated, the conclusions being left to the reader.

The construction was granted to M. Soupe, who in turn entered into contracts to sublet a portion of the work.[2] The Administration, which, by the terms of the agreement, had reserved to itself the right of purchasing direct its own plant, preferred to incur the heavy

[1] I am not taking into account the Hong-Hay and Kébao coal lines.

[2] The bridges were paid for direct.

cost of an intermediary, and to pay, by reason of its bargain with him, a commission of eighteen per cent. or £12,000, which might have been saved. There were plenty of indications to show how much the State would lose by this course, but no heed seems to have been paid to them, and the instructions received by letter from the Under Secretary of State were in many instances contradictory, and placed the resident engineers in a most embarrassing position.

Such being the mode of purchase, it remains to be seen what was the material used. In the first place, the gauge adopted was that of two feet, though, as a Dutch engineer whom I met, remarked: "Neither in the English Colonies, nor in our own is a gauge of less than three feet four inches adopted, especially upon lines of over sixty miles in length, as the rolling stock wears out too quickly; moreover, with a line traversing a mountainous country and an incline of one in thirty-three the narrow-gauge system cannot have more than three carriages to a train. The forty-inch gauge has even been used in Tonkin for private undertakings, such as the Hong-Hay collieries, so that there is all the more reason for adopting it over long lines."

With regard to the quality of the rolling stock, some of the engines and carriages which had been used at the Exhibition had been sent over, and even if they were all in good condition, which I believe is not the case, they would be open to the objection of being unsuitable to warm climates.

When a question was asked in the Paris Chamber of Deputies on November 27, 1890, with regard to

Under Secretary of State for the Colonies replied that he had been induced to take the initiative of beginning the works without having consulted the Chamber, owing to the urgent necessity for revictualling troops in a distant outpost and transporting so many soldiers.

With regard to this latter point, it might have been objected that the carriages purchased are not suitable for warm climates; and here again I must ask the reader to consider the course which the English follow in similar circumstances. So that, in justification of the preference given to the plant selected over that of other firms, it is difficult to invoke the strategical and military interests at stake, for transport by it will be slow in mountainous districts, while in the hot season it would be dangerous for the health of the troops.

Passing on from the criticisms to be made upon the gauge and the selection of rolling stock, let us consider for a moment the working of the line. The Under Secretary said in the speech referred to, that part of the line would be open in the beginning of 1891, and all the rest by the end of that year. We are now well on into 1893, and this prediction has not yet been fulfilled. It was stipulated in the contract that before the opening of the works, the track of the line should be made out by the Government engineer with the contractor present while it was being done.

I believe that some preliminary survey was made, but owing to the insecurity of the district, the poles and other *points de repère* were in many cases destroyed. Moreover, the survey was made in view of a forty-inch gauge, so that it could not be applicable to one

of two feet, the advantage of which was that it would adapt itself more readily to the irregularities of the ground. As to the contractor, he insisted upon the application of the original survey to the new line, in order to have more work and embankments to execute. Moreover, the representative of M. Souppe did not seem to have the necessary competence for the direction of the works, and the Government engineer accordingly offered to help him with his staff. But this course was disapproved of by the contractors in Paris, who obtained the recall of M. Lion, the State engineer, who, however, has since been sent back to Tonkin as consulting engineer to the Government.

After his departure, some important concessions were made to the contractors, who were allowed, upon the ground that the line had not been commenced properly, to do over again a sixth of the eleven or twelve miles already laid, and this at a cost to the country of between thirty and forty thousand piastres.

They were also allowed to do what had hitherto been refused, that is, instead of paying the workmen by the hour, to do the work by piece, this system being more advantageous to the contractors than to the State. Moreover, when in the course of making the road, a very difficult bit of work was encountered, the route was altered, and near Bac-Lé five different plans were adopted, the one after the other, until, when the embankment constructed towards the end had been washed away, a sixth had to be prepared and carried out.

Moreover, how is it possible for an enterprise to be properly managed when it passes through so

many different hands. It is a pity that those who have colonial questions at heart cannot read the private reports as to matters of this kind, for they would then see how the interests of the State are treated by those whose first mission it should be to protect them. It is not only in the works undertaken for preparing the road that there has been culpable neglect, but the transports from Phulang-Tuong to Langson were conceded for two years to a contractor at the rate of about five shillings a ton, and when, at the expiration of the two years, they were put up to contract, they were accepted by another contractor at just a third of the price.

I am now told that, thanks to the authority of the Governor-General, the works are making good progress and that the forty-inch gauge will probably be substituted for the two feet one. When M. de Lanessan visited the Hong-Hay mines, he was surprised at the small cost of laying down a mile of forty-inch line, the work being done by a company which had its own interests to study. But between Phulang-Tuong and Langson the work was being done by the State, which was considered fair game for every one.

In brief, the construction of the railway was in the first instance estimated at £160,000, and it has already cost double; while we may deem ourselves lucky if it is completed for another £160,000. Although the ground is level and there are no great material difficulties in the way, less than five and twenty miles in a straight line have been laid in two years, while in the same period the English have constructed five times the length in a very

hilly country. These are comparisons humiliating to make, but I think that it is my duty to point out the mischief in the hope of our being able to discover the remedy.

I have endeavoured to show in as few words as possible what has already been done in the way of colonization, and when it is remembered that we have only been in Tonkin seven or eight years, it may fairly be said that we have effected a good deal; though if we look at what the English and Dutch colonies bring in both to private individuals and the State, we find that they are far in advance of us. Our inferiority may be ascribed to two causes, the first of which is often dependent upon the second: viz. piracy and the administrative system.

## PIRACY.

The country is not pacified, as might without any feeling of humiliation be admitted by those in authority, for it is not often that a colony is found to be quiet immediately after it has been taken possession of: Algeria and Burmah being very striking illustrations of this. Moreover, in Tonkin, piracy is an endemic disease, which existed long before our presence there. The only thing is that when the mother-country knows the exact state of the case, it will be in a position to adopt the measures necessary for reducing the evil; that is to say, it will make the required sacrifice of men and money in order to put an end to this state of things. If she does not do so, she will be subjected to constant disappointments and deceptions, eventually spending much more than

she would have done in the first instance, without attaining the same result. It is this system of driblets which at present prevails in Tonkin.

Those whose duty it is to keep the Government informed of what is going on do not dare to admit the truth, for fear of its being too painful to swallow. This is giving us credit for very little common sense. Not only do they fail to speak the truth, but they say the very opposite, and they are constantly writing and telegraphing to say that "the Delta is pacified."

Letters and telegrams which seek to make us believe this are all false, and the wish is father to the thought, and the facts which are within my own knowledge suffice to give the lie to the assertions of eminent personages, who, with what they deem to be a patriotic object, advance statements which it would be so easy for them to prove if they were true. Let them only traverse without an escort the region known as the Delta from east to west. They need not even announce their journey in advance, for the pirates are well posted in what goes on, and any sort of movement is brought to their knowledge. If, in these circumstances, the traveller or travellers can, without hindrance, start from Ninh-Binh, reach Kep and Langson, and thence go down to Quang-Yen, all the world will be convinced of the complete pacification of the Delta, and I, for my part, will withdraw all I have said and make the most humble apology. But, pending that, I must crave leave to doubt the value of the optimistic official statements with which the French newspapers are inundated. Volumes

economy would also arise. But this would carry us too far, bringing into conflict the partisans of the civil and the military systems, those who favour a protectorate and those who advocate conquest outright, each theory lending itself to valid arguments.

Our original error consisted in believing first that one system was good and then the other, the two being, perhaps, diametrically opposed. The consequence is that there has been a lack of unity and cohesion in our ideas, and we have undone one day what had been done the day before. The colony has suffered from this vacillation, and while the mischief we have done has been of advantage to our enemies, the good we have done has been of little profit to ourselves, as it has been a mere isolated incident, and has not grafted itself on to anything which had occurred before.

Tonkin was taken by force of arms, and then came the Philastre mission, the deplorable results of which need not be referred to here; after this, there was a succession of generals, who applied the system of conquest in the most rigorous way possible. Finding that this had been carried too far, the civil *régime* was all at once substituted for the military, and the latter force was at a loss what attitude to assume. The instructions which it had received were, as we learnt from M. Constans in 1888, directly opposite to those of the Governor-General. In order to check what was regarded as the excessive zeal of the military element, the outposts were forbidden to make any kind of sortie without permission of the civil government, while the natives were enjoined not to give them any direct information whatever.

This state of affairs did not last long, but it had led to the surprise of several outposts and to the death of a great many soldiers. A little later, we find the organization of the country making slow progress, with occasional hostilities between the civil and the military, until the arrival of M. de Lanessan. It seemed then as if an era of contentment was about to begin ; roads were made, military territories, the formation of which had been asked for in the reports of M. Bonnat, buried away, no doubt, in the pigeon-holes of the administration, were at last created, columns were formed in the Dong-Trieu and the Yen-Thé, and a system of maritime defence was organized. It seemed, indeed, as if Tonkin was going to be administered by a governor with more intelligence than his predecessors. But if we skip a few months what do we find but promises unfulfilled, half-measures and a lack of continuity ? In regard to the formation of military territories, the advice of experienced men was only partly followed, and their plans were in many cases lost before they had been examined. Despite the express opinion of the colonel commanding the Black River territory, the region between the Red River and its right tributary was only embodied in a single command after the capture of the Yen-lang post by the notorious Doc-Ngu. Not till then was the anomaly suppressed by which the lands included within the angle of the two rivers were under three different controls, one of these being a civil authority. The consequence was that the pirates passed with impunity from one region into another ; and it was not until a captain and six men had

necessity of taking steps for driving Doc-Ngu into a corner. It was only the other day, again, that another territory was dislocated, the motive for this proceeding being one to which I shall refer later on.

The effective of our troops is too small. We disturb the enemy without crushing him, and when we have got him into a critical position, we give up pursuit and let him have time to recuperate, while our efforts tend in another direction. This mode of proceeding neutralizes the best possible results. The public probably has no idea of the number of European troops in Tonkin on paper. There are 8,000, but we could not put in the field more than 3,000, all the accessory services being discharged by regular soldiers. These figures are supplied me by field officers, who are urgent in their demand for reinforcements, while by a singular phenomenon, in proportion as the army demands an increase of its contingents, the civil authority insists upon a reduction. The course of events supplies the sole answer as to which of the two demands is justified.

So far as the sea was concerned, a vigorous course of action seemed to have stopped piracy, and, with forts established at various points, we were justified in assuming that tranquillity would prevail along the coast. But, strange to say, these forts were withdrawn without the admiral having been consulted; the Indo-Chinese naval division was suppressed, and the credit opened for the repair of the gunboats was allotted to another branch of expenditure, all this simultaneous with the permission given the native junks to carry rapid-firing guns and rifles. But I will not pursue the matter further, as those

who are interested in the questions relating to the Far East, and to whom our national honour is dear, will have learnt quite enough from the newspapers. The renewal of friendly relations with the Court of Annam, the reconciliation effected by the governor of that court with the Kinh-luoc, who had until then compromised his safety by siding with us, the dangerous arming of an Annamite guard placed at the disposal of the mandarins, and the strange bickerings arising out of personal questions between civilians and soldiers of the same country, are facts of too great gravity to remain unknown.

During the eight years that we have governed the country, there has been an endless succession of changes, contradictions in the lines of conduct of the different governors, and often in the acts of the same one. In these circumstances, so far is it from being extraordinary that piracy exists, the wonder is that the country should be comparatively quiet, for we have to do with the Semites, whose immobility for hundreds of years is such a strange problem to us. The Annamites, in particular, have been subject, without themselves being in any way altered, to many different yokes, and they say to themselves that the French, like others who have been before them, more even than others, will disappear in their turn. They bestir themselves and they wait.

It is high time for us to know what we wish to do, and what we can do, to make no bones about it, and to add practice to theory, incurring the necessary sacrifices, and conforming invariably to a steady course of policy, the main lines of which would be administrated for us by men of experience. There is no lack

of such, but they are not often consulted, as their outspoken frankness, their tenacity, their courage and their common sense, the only qualities, the application of which will ensure the complete success of our enterprise in Tonkin, are feared rather than courted.

A well-ordered internal government of the country would not suffice for the repression of piracy, for it would require to be backed up by a vigorous foreign policy. It is needful that we should be feared by our neighbours, Siam and China, and that our name should inspire respect in China, which it does not do at present upon the other side of our eastern frontier, which is very barely protected. The pirates are brought into contact with their former leaders, who are under the patronage of the Chinese Government, and they are able to procure arms and money, and to find a market where they can exchange the Annamite women for the opium in which they do a contraband trade to our detriment. They even employ regular Chinese troops as reinforcements for a fixed price. This state of things, humiliating for us, cannot even be excused upon the ground of its being unknown to those in authority. The organized resistance of the Viceroy of Canton was denounced as far back as 1887 in the Chamber of Deputies, and since that time it has been constantly pointed out by the officers forming part of the boundary commission, while it has been openly avowed in black and white by officers in the Chinese service. We have been continually forewarned, and the warnings have been borne out by the facts.

All that the French Government has done, in reply

to the threats of China, has been to make concessions, thus giving our adversaries all the points in the game.

It is needless to recall all the humiliations which we have had to go through in the Far East, or the errors committed since the conclusion of treaties by the intermediary of agents of the Anglo-Chinese Customs, whom we decorated with the Legion of Honour, and who made game of us, since the violation by China of Clause VII. in the Treaty of Tien-Tsin, which conferred upon us the original right to the concession of railways, since the easy going surrender of disputed frontier districts, up to the insults levelled at our minister by the Viceroy of Petchili. It seems to me that the measure is full to running over, and after having been smitten upon one cheek and tendered the other, we can go no further in this direction unless we resign ourselves to be kicked.

"The blood mantled to my cheeks," remarked to me an officer who had just come back from the frontier, where he had seen our soldiers insulted, our landmarks pulled up by the Chinese who spat upon them, our flag outraged, while our men were formally instructed to take no notice."

To those who would urge that the Chinese Empire is of vast extent, that the provinces remote from the central power do not respect its orders, that the Tsung li Yamen is not responsible for what occurs at Konang Si, I would begin by saying that this is not so, and those who have any knowledge of China are well aware of its method of procedure. Upon a com-

distinct orders are sent to the persons inculpated, the first, which is published in all directions, advising them to render us justice, while the second, which is secret and the only one valid, bids them continue in the same course. I have had many proofs of this mode of conduct, and it is, moreover, well known to all travellers and missionaries who have been in direct communication with the Chinese and have paid close attention to them.

But, admitting even that Pekin is powerless to repress disorders occurring in its provinces which do us damage, are we not justified in replying: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth? the *lex talionis* being the only one which barbarians can be made to understand.

The motto adopted for our foreign policy is to avoid all unpleasantness. As long as this axiom is imposed as a rule of conduct upon our agents in the East, we shall lose each day a shred the more of our prestige, until it has quite vanished, nor is that day far distant. When it comes, we must not be surprised at anything which happens to us, for the mischief done will be immense and the remedy difficult and costly.

Before we are reduced to take extreme measures, it is desirable that the whole truth should be known, after which we may look about for the best means of warding off the danger, the primordial conditions for the suppression of piracy being sincerity and a spirit of coherency at home and energy abroad. I have already mentioned two causes which retard the development of the colony; piracy and the system of administration, the former being sometimes due to the latter.

### THE ADMINISTRATION.

It is too numerous; it is partially composed of incapables and of men with bad antecedents; it is too ignorant and meddlesome; it endeavours to raise difficulties and to check all means of action; for the most part born of favouritism, it endeavours to indulge in the same practice and displeases those who obtain what they apply for as well as those who are passed over.

There is little need to adduce instances, for all persons of intelligence who have been in Tonkin will understand me. I could quote the case of a clerk sent from Paris by the Under Secretary of State, rejected by the Governor-General and compelled to return home, the whole journey being so much out of the pockets of the tax-payers. Then there is such a plethora of functionaries that some of them have to wait at Hanoï or Saïgon for several months before employment can be found for them, while different posts are invented solely for giving employment to the *protégés* of senators and the friends of deputies.

What explanation can be offered for the complicated machinery of administration, for the long list of functionaries from the junior clerk at the Residency to the vice-residents and the residents of the first, second, and third class, or of the scandalous way in which some of them are promoted to the detriment of others?

Will anybody explain why some of them have been able to obtain £1,200 for cost of transport from place to place where the commander of an outpost

gets only £240 ? Then there is the constant shifting of residents, some localities having had as many as five in the twelvemonth.

I do not wish to be taken for a pamphleteer, but I would advise any readers who may wish to get to the bottom of the matter to peruse the Tonkin papers or to have a talk with some colonist. I have had many opportunities of making an investigation of this kind, and for my own part I know well what to think of the administrative system, and in many cases it is the pirates who undertake to familiarize us with it.

If it was not known what changes need be made in the recruiting and organization of the staff, there would be some excuse, but several of them have been pointed out; and M. Harmand, in his translation of *British India* and in the preface which precedes it, like M. Chailley-Bert in his work upon English colonization, shows us what our rivals are capable of. They succeed, and why should we not imitate them ? for there is nothing undignified in borrowing what is good from our enemies, like the Romans who conquered the world by following up that maxim.

This does not imply that none of our civil functionaries in Tonkin are well instructed or experienced. Upon the contrary, they comprise many men of high worth, but the constant changes to which they are subjected and the limits within which their activity is confined does not admit of their giving the country the benefit of their good qualities, as they might do on other conditions.

Above all, it is incumbent that Tonkin should not be regarded as a place for shooting rubbish and for providing posts for all the *protégés* of influential

personages. The work of administration is more difficult than in France, on account of its special character, and this is an additional reason for not supposing that those who are useless at home will do for the colony. On the contrary, the *personnel* intended for Tonkin should be recruited with special care, and candidates should be expected to possess, in addition to good education, experience, moral virtue, and special capacities. When an applicant is found to possess these necessary qualities, he should be left free to show what he is capable of by allowing him to occupy the same post for a reasonable period.

However capable he may be, what possible chance can an unfortunate official have who is always on the eve of being shifted? What is the use of his attempting to get well acquainted with his subordinates, to form a body of police, to encourage the colonists, or to make any experiments?

Is he not to be excused if he often exhibits very little zeal in his post and just lets things slide? Most of the errors committed are to be imputed not to him but to the powers above him. If an official does not feel himself backed up, he will not show any energy, for in matters of colonization, as in others, "like master like man." Without needing to go so far afield as the English colonies, we have one which has been for a long time admirably administered, and that is Cochin-China. The organization which has made it so prosperous is due to Admiral de la Grandière; and M. de Lanessan, in one of the chapters of his book on Indo-China, explains the nature of that organization and points out the errors which have been committed

since. We are entitled to expect that he will take the steps which he deemed necessary to repair them, notably the suppression of the Colonial Council as it is at present organized, and the re-establishment of the excellent training-school which produced such wonderful results.

## FINANCE.

A defective financial system is the necessary outcome of a defective administration, and, without attempting to examine into the question of the incidence of taxation, I think that I shall be echoing the feelings of most of the colonists in making the following criticisms :—

The generalization of monopolies, the opium concession, more particularly in the establishment of which the views of interested persons were quite ignored, and in regard to which there has been as much waste as upon the Langson railway. This has encouraged smuggling and consequently piracy, prevented the cultivation of other crops which would be very productive in the country, and injured trade in general by prohibiting the use as an object of exchange of an article which, in Tonkin at one time as in China still, was constantly employed as current coin, because of its taking up so little room, being so high in price, and so generally in use. These monopolies in many cases offend the natives, and a resident told me that this had been the case with the forest of Thai-Hoa. Whole rafts of floating timber had been abandoned by the inhabitants of the district rather than pay exorbitant duties to those who had obtained a grant

for exploiting these forests, and the Annamites, cut off in this way from their former means of livelihood, are apt to develop into pirates.

Other grievances are the difficulties placed in the way of meeting all applications for concessions, and I have already given an instance of this in regard to the mines at Hong-Hay. Then there is the long string of formalities, red tape documents, and impediments of every kind which are thrown in the way of any enterprise which is likely to succeed. One would really imagine, looking at the mere facts of the case, that it is the desire of the Government to prevent as far as it can any personal initiative either of those in its service or of the colonist, and this without having put a stop to the abuse of influence on the part of the former.

Then, again, there is the question of favouritism. A friend in the colony who has only too good reason to know what he is talking about, writes to me: "You are well aware of the contracts which M. de Lanessan has concluded privately; after having promised all the contractors to let each of them have his share in the series of important works which had to be carried out, he conciliated the larger ones by assigning them the Hanoï hospitals, the Langson railway, and the barracks at Dop-Cau. When the turn of the small men came, he made some sort of excuse for putting out the rest of the work to be tendered for, allowing those who had already secured work to take their chance. The result was that they got all, and the little men nothing. We have never seen a grosser case of favouritism out here."

Small outlays, when accumulated and when they

the expenditure of a big sum all at once, and the deplorable results of this system of false economy are to be seen in every direction. It is through this that the barracks of Phalang-Tuong and of the Seven Pagodas, which cost 180,000 piastres, already require rebuilding. A post had been constructed at Yen-Lan, and shortly afterwards it was decided to erect another, at about an hour's march from there, at Dong-Trieu. This latter was built at a cost of 15,000 piastres, but when it came to putting on the roof the funds, it was found, were exhausted. What did those in authority do but take the tiles off the roof of the post-house at Yen-Lan and put them on the other! The consequence was that the former is falling into ruins and will have to be rebuilt. I could quote many other cases of the same kind.

There is a fixed resolve, moreover, to turn every transaction to financial account, no matter how vexatious may be the methods resorted to. Any one who is about to negotiate an affair with the administration has to lodge a sum of money as deposit, and in the beginning interest was allowed at the rate of 3 per cent., and this in a country were money was worth 10 or 12. But now the money is lodged in a local deposit bank, which not only gives no interest, but takes three or four months to cash a treasury order. The financial difficulties of the Government may be held to extenuate this procedure, but there is no excuse for certain illicit doings, of which I will quote only one instance :—

The Chinaman who had the monopoly for the vehicles known as *pousse-pousse* at Hanoï, had paid 5,000 piastres as caution money. Under the pretence of

placing the money in the coffers of the French deposit bank, the administration converted it into francs (about 19,000). When, about two and a half years later, the depositor applied for the return of his caution money, the piastre having in the meanwhile dropped in value, he was told that he had only 4,500 piastres to his credit. The Chinaman protested, and though he was told that he had better sue the administration for it, he had not the means to prosecute his suit and was compelled to put up with the first loss.

### THE WRETCHED CONDITION OF THE TROOPS.

I need not repeat here what the conditions of existence for our soldiers have been since the occupation, and I will leave others to describe the defective sanitary conditions, as regards lodging, food and clothing to which they have constantly been subjected; it will be seen what waste there has been in the victualling department, and how little has been done to ameliorate the material existence of men and officers alike, while, in striking contrast to the small outlay upon the troops, may be placed the useless expense incurred in the moving about of so many officials from post to post. The public will then see what are the true reasons which have given Tonkin so bad a reputation, from the point of view of climate. I remember a post where we halted during the journey I made in 1889, upon the right bank of the Red River. It had been arranged that the soldiers, who had at first been encamped in the middle of marshes, in the bottom of a fever-stricken hollow, should be located upon an eminence more healthily situated, and

it will scarcely be credited that the sum allotted by the government for the construction of new buildings was fifteen piastres: that is to say not quite fifty shillings. This was all that the troops were to expect, apart from their own resources in money and labour.

Since then, much has been done to improve the condition of the troops, but it is still very far from what it should be. In proof of this, let me mention that a battalion of marine infantry has received no European outfit since 1889, and in some posts there are more men than there are boots, so that the soldiers can only go out by turns. In other places they have to wear odd buttons with their uniforms, and to get the Chinese to cut out anchors in red cloth to fasten on to their collars.

That is what we are reduced to, the protests of officers, even of generals being powerless, while the staff sends in report upon report, these documents merely going to swell the mountain of waste paper which is allowed to accumulate in the bureaux. The governor himself, in whom it was hoped reliance might be placed, is obliged to admit that it is one thing to promise and another to perform. So far as regards finance, a beginning has yet to be made, and to quote the opinion put forward by a colonial councillor, M. Gareesie, in the course of his speech upon the loan of four millions sterling: "The remedy for our present evils and for our very critical financial position, consists mainly in the cessation of the anarchy which pervades the whole administration, and in the constant efforts of our deputies to obtain places for their *protégés* from the Foreign and Colonial offices

this speech, which, made in 1888, is often referred to by M. de Lanessan in his work and which still holds true. It is very instructive, as showing one aspect of the future which I have attempted to delineate.

The public should be brought to understand the grandeur of the work which has fallen to France for execution in Indo-China; to realize the means hitherto employed in carrying it to a successful completion; to pass its judgment upon the individuals engaged in it; to feel what are the faults which have been committed; and to learn by the experience which has been acquired the remedies most suitable for application. But this examination of affairs might entail a very serious danger. Some people, finding how many faults had been committed might be tempted to confuse the administered with the administrators, and to conclude from the meagre result hitherto allowed that Tonkin is not worth what it cost to conquer. Such an idea would be erroneous. Because a farmer manages his land badly and does not make the most of it, does it follow that the land is bad? What, too, should the owner do who does not get his rent? Surely not sell very cheap what had cost him dear, but preserve what he had got and secure a fresh steward. Above all, I should, were it my case, consult men of wide experience, see what course those of my neighbours who had been successful had followed, and take into consideration the views of those who had been over my property.

In this case, those who have endeavoured to bring the whole truth before the public, will, whatever errors they have made, be quite easy in their minds, and I, for my own part, am quite prepared for any retort or

attack. I can say in my reply that I have been twice into the country; I have had my eyes about me, I have conversed with civilians, soldiers and colonists, and I have been thoroughly sincere; so that in bringing before the world the outcome of my inquiries and observations, I have, to the best of my belief, worked towards the advancement of the cause which has been and ever will be my sole aim, whatever difficulties may be thrown in my way: viz., the greatness of my country.

# CHAPTER IV.

From Hanoï to Van-Bou—Departure from Hanoï—Luggage—The Black River—Cho-Bo (excursion to Cao-Phong and to Thac-By)—In canoes—The Doc Ngu—Native Story—Van-Yen—Our Followers, Boatmen and Boys—Arrival at Van-Bou.

THE Hôtel Alexandre, which I may call the principal one in Hanoï, without wishing to reflect upon the others, is large and clean. This is the second time I have stayed there, and the travellers and officials who have not yet got settled into their houses mostly go there. The walls of the rooms are white-washed, and one sees a few little *jekkofs* running about and uttering their plaintive cry. But they are said to bring luck, and, besides, they give local colour to the scene. The windows do not close properly, but it is not cold, and all one has to do is to put one's valuables under the pillow, lock one's door, and put the key in one's pocket, for every traveller ought ever to have before him the maxim of Dr. Pangloss. On the ground floor is a large room with two billiard tables, and a number of small tables, around which the French element in Hanoï assemble to breakfast or dine, when not invited elsewhere or at the club. It is a great resort, too, for a "bitter" before dinner, the custom being to play a game of cards or dominoes to decide

who shall pay. Filled with officers, residents and tradesmen, the Café is not frequented by the principal officials and the administrative aristocracy of Hanoï, for there is one class here quite above the rest, as is inevitably the case even in a free country. As a general rule, concord prevails, gossip is very rare, and ill-natured remarks little listened to, the French inhabitants of Hanoï not having yet come to loggerheads among one another after the fashion of journalists, and of journalists and soldiers, as gathered from the last papers received from Paris. The *régime* of favouritism and the fear entertained by the Government for the press has not yet lighted that spirit of discord, the effects of which we have to deplore so often at home. Quiet as it was at the time of my visit, French society in Tonkin would form an interesting study, for a colony is, in reality, like a mirror which reflects the mother country, accentuating the features, stripping off the disguises and bringing the individual characteristics into relief. In short, a colony exhibits in a somewhat exaggerated form the defects as well as the qualities. Nothing can be more instructive than the study of a system of colonization, not only in regard to the benefit conferred upon the conquered country, but in respect to the relations which exist among the newcomers.

It is impossible, however, for me to indulge in any observations upon this head, as my feelings of gratitude towards the many people who extended to me a cordial welcome prevent me from saying anything, even from the not very enviable standpoint of the psychologist. Moreover, if I had gone into this subject, I should have remained in Hanoï so long, and

had so much to write that I should not have got any further.

After a stay of ten days, our preparations are completed, and as the first part of our expedition is to be by water, we are not obliged to be very particular as to the quantity of our luggage. By the advice of M. Pavie, we have had made several small wooden cases covered with sheeting, the weight of which, when filled, will not exceed 56 lbs. This division of the baggage into small parts is necessary in view of their being eventually carried by porters. They contain preserved meats and fruits which will be used more for presents at the different stations than for our own consumption; ammunition, such as powder, shot and cartridges, and presents which are intended for the chiefs and also to be used as articles of exchange, these consisting chiefly of musical boxes, photographs, and pictures, purses, watches, alarums, needles, looking-glasses, and many other "articles de Paris," worth in all about £40. Our weapons comprise a No. 8 rifle in case of our getting a shot at an elephant, a 450 rifle, two Winchesters, two No. 12 rifles, and a gun for shooting small birds.

Our clothes do not take up much room, consisting of a few flannel shirts, a woollen coat, linen trousers and vests, and porpoise-skin boots, which latter I recommend as being waterproof, strong, and very supple. Our general head-dress is a sun-helmet.

We had to buy at Hanoï some stores and indispensable instruments, such as sugar, tea, coffee, and cooking utensils—if such a title can be given to a few saucepans and kettles. As far as our individual wants are concerned, we have confined ourselves to

what are strictly necessaries, and that is not very much.

But as it is my intention to make as many collections as possible *en route*, we decided to provide ourselves with materials of quite another kind, such, for instance, as arsenical soap, alum, and what is needed for stuffing birds, a salt barrel for the mammiferæ, and brine being the best of all preservatives, it is desirable to carry as much of that as possible. When we get towards the sources of the Black River, I intend to give what salt remains over to the natives, who are certain to be highly pleased with such a present. A second empty barrel and a supply of acetate of soda will enable us to bring back a few fish, this kind of salt being more suitable than alcohol when one is travelling. The insects are to be preserved in sawdust and naphthaline, while we have to take a large quantity of paper for wrapping up the specimens and the grasses, a few snares, some strychnine, safety cartridges for fishing, alcohol and silk nets, completing our natural history outfit.

In the way of photography, I have two cameras, one of them, a Nadar detective, 11 × 18, being that which M. Bonvalot and myself took with us through Thibet, and it is very good as regards its objective and its solidity. The other, rather lighter, is constructed upon the same pattern, each piece, each screw and each spring of these cameras taking to pieces, and I have a double set of everything, so that we shall be able to have 120 photographs in preparation at the same time. As upon previous occasions I have provided myself with the *Eastman Film*, which gives good, though not always very

regular results, and I have selected celluloid plates, which I always find produce very good proofs, despite the heat or the damp. When the photographs have been properly dried, they will be rolled up and placed in tin tubes, previously done over with lampblack inside. Preserved in this way, they will keep good at least a year before being developed, for during our Thibet journey I had some which came out well after being kept thirteen months. On the chance of being able to find time to develop a few *en route*, I have taken the necessary materials, but I fear that there will be *little* opportunity for this.

We have to take what money we shall require in the form of piastres, which can, if we want to pay by weight, be cut into fragments. An order for payment of 500 rupees will be useful to us in the event of our touching English territory, and, in addition to the 1,600 piastres which I take with me from Hanoï, I have made an arrangement with the Treasury by which I shall be able to draw 400 more at Van-Bou, while we have authority from the Marine Commissariat to purchase provisions at the different forts.

A passport, too, was given us by the Governor-General, authorizing us to travel in the Laos provinces and Siam, a certain number of these being sent from the Siamese Court at Bangkok to the French Governor at Saïgon, with the name of the person or persons for whom it is intended left in blank, for it appears that, despite the treaties which confer upon us the right of navigating the Mékong, a Siamese permit is necessary for the French who wish to explore the upper valley of the stream, or even its affluents on the left bank. For my own part, I have

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resolved to use my passport as rarely as possible. M. Guillaume, a clerk in the telegraph department, whom I met at Hanoï, told me that while he was surveying for a line to Luang-Praboang, he met with all kinds of difficulties from the people of Siam, despite, or perhaps because of, the passport with which he was provided. For my own part, I have already had occasion in China to see what little value Oriental people, even those who are by way of being the most civilized, attach to official documents and papers of identification. In packing up all these miscellaneous objects, we have endeavoured to distribute them all in such a way that if we lose any of our luggage we may not be deprived altogether of any one thing.

Our party comprises three Annamites: Sao, a good shot, according to his own account, and knowing how to stuff birds; Thou, who claims to be an expert in most things and who has already been through the Laos country with Mr. Macey; and Baptiste, who is to do the cooking.

We shall know more about them later on, and the knowledge will be gained at our own expense, but, to start with, they agree to all our proposals, making, however, certain mental reserves. They must, however, think that I am a little off my head when I tell them that they will all of them have to put their hands to anything and that I do not intend them to take advantage of the principle of "division of labour," to let one of them stand idle while the others are hard at work.

I have not yet an interpreter, but have been promised one at Cho-Bo, for although in the Delta almost any servant can act as interpreter, this is not

the case when one gets into the upper districts where Annamite is not spoken, and we may esteem ourselves fortunate if we succeed in getting hold of a native who understands French and the Muong dialects. Several friends had been kind enough, with the permission of the Government, to secure for me one of the Cambodian translators of the Pavie Mission, but by a singular piece of ill-luck, Camboun, as he was called, had crossed us at Haïphong without knowing we were there and had started for home. In my opinion, this mishap was not quite so accidental as it seemed, and I believe that if one had been able to go back to "first causes," it would have been found that there was a woman at the bottom of it. However, there is no help for it, and we must trust to our luck.

The date is January 22nd (1892), and M. Chavassieux, the French resident, who is himself going as far as Cho-Bo, offers to take us with him on the steamer of that name. This vessel, which has two paddles in the stern and belongs to the Messageries Fluviales, has recently gone up the Red River as far as Lao-Kay. After halting for the night near Viebsi, we reach, in the course of the following morning, the confluent of the Black River, the line of demarcation being made very distinct by the colours of the water, and we are told that soles, for instance, will not go beyond it, while skate, on the other hand, will go up the river to within a short distance of Cho-Bo. To the right may be seen the white houses of Honghoa, half hidden in verdure, and beyond them the hills at the foot of which they are built.

We are still in the Delta, or at all events in a flat country, but just beyond this the ground begins to

rise in all directions, to the left being visible the enormous mass of the Bari, which we had already seen from Hanoï, its outlines enveloped in mist reminding one somewhat of the Fusi-Yama, a mountain so pure and perfect that it has been styled "the pearl of Japan." Mount Bari, though it has so far been very little explored, has delighted botanists by the wealth and variety of its fauna. There are more than twenty different kinds of oaks upon its slopes, but it is impossible to settle there in security. Only a short time ago, a French family of colonists was massacred out of sheer vengeance, the father being bled like a pig, while the son had his throat cut but was not decapitated, this being because his murderers wanted to indicate that he spoke the language of the country but made a bad use of it. The mother was killed in order to get rid of an awkward witness.

Between Mount Bari and the river, and upon the banks of the latter, stand, like the ruins of some cathedral overrun by ivy and wild plants, the Notre Dame rocks, with a small post of soldiers established upon the platform which serves as a sort of natural fort.

These rocks seem as if they had been reared there by nature in order to form a gigantic boundary stone for the limits of the Delta, as the country from this point assumes quite a different aspect, the banks narrowing so much that in places the current is not more than from 195 to 330 feet broad, while they are much higher and are so covered with plants and brushwood that the rock is entirely hidden from view. In other places, the brush does not extend all the way down the cliff, forming a sort of top-knot for it, the flanks being quite denuded and reminding one of the cliffs in the

Bay of Along, the formations of the Dong-Trieu and the enormous elevations of which we shall see so many between this and Laos.

So far, our steamer had advanced very slowly, endeavouring, sometimes without success, to avoid the sandbanks and frequently compelled to back-water in order to describe a complete circle. As we steamed along flocks of wild geese, herons and other sea-birds rose in clouds above our heads, quite out of shot, while the canoes were flitting about the river like a flock of ducks, more than sixty of them being counted by us as they conveyed the household goods of a village which was migrating *en bloc*. Further on, we met several large masts made of timber and bamboo, and soon after we got into deep water, where the navigation was much easier.

Despite the savage grandeur of the scenery, we are not sorry to emerge from this sombre, damp, and rather sinister passage, and as we round a sharp curve we find ourselves in the full sunlight, with the walled rock closing, as it were, behind us. The river, divided into several arms, extends to the bottom of a vast basin, shut in up the stream by a chaos of gray rocks flung anyhow, one upon the other.

While we cast anchor, and the steamer's whistle announces our arrival, a troop of native soldiers, carrying the French flag, and commanded by two civil guards, descend the hill, preceded by a French-man in dress clothes, who is coming to present the garrison and the chiefs of the country to the Resident.

M. Vacle, the Government Commissioner, is well-

several years in the district of the Notre Dame rocks, considered to be a very dangerous one, without having ever been attacked by the pirates, while the natives, so far from molesting him, often called him in to arbitrate between them. Promoted, after having belonged to the Pavie Mission, to the post which he now occupies at Cho-Bo, M. Vacle is bound, from his wide experience and notoriety, to render considerable service to the Government. We are given quarters in the post, where we settle ourselves on the day after the departure of the steamer and its passengers, and it is not without a certain sense of satisfaction that I see the last link which connects us with the self-styled world of civilisation snapped asunder. Before going up the Black River, we are compelled to make a halt of several days here. The spot is a pleasant one, though we are told that it is unhealthy at certain seasons, the thermometer varying from 50° to 77° Fahr. The enemy most dreaded by the few Europeans, such as postal employés and the representative of the opium monopoly, who have to reside at Cho-Bo, is, moreover, not so much the sun, or even fever, as the *Doc Ngu;* the garrison is insufficient, and the place is at the mercy of a sudden descent of that terrible pirate chief whose hitherto unconquered bands infest the delta formed by the Black and the Red rivers. The recollection of the terrible drama of which Cho-Bo was the theatre over a year ago is still very vivid, and the ruins of the former Residency are yet standing witnesses of what occurred through the incompetence, the blindness, and the obstinacy of French officials, viz., the decapitation of M. Rougerie, the Resident

the massacre of the garrison, and the seizure of 30,000 cartridges and of several rapid-firing rifles. Yet there had been no lack of warnings, for M. Piquet, the Governor-General, had been told by M. Pavie of what was likely to happen, and several native chiefs themselves had intimated that they could no longer be answerable for the inhabitants. M. Rougerie thought that he was a match for them all, and, trusting in his own powers, he despised the advice dictated to him by experience, though as he paid for his error with his life, we must hope that the earth rests lightly upon him.

The Government recognized its mistakes, the selection of M. Vacle being a proof of this, and the universal confidence which he inspired justifies it. The same natives who before paid the Doc Ngu to avenge them, now paying him a tithe, though in the present instance it is to get him to spare Cho-Bo and all its inhabitants. The feeling of confidence does not, however, imply lack of precaution, and there is no risk of appearing ridiculous when one loads one's rifle or revolvers before going off to sleep—always with one eye open. Excepting the bands of the Doc Ngu, composed partly of Annamites, partly of Chinese formerly belonging to the yellow flags of Phu-Yen, the natives of Cho-Bo and of the neighbourhood are for the most part peaceably disposed.

We are here at the dividing point of two regions under absolutely distinct systems of administration—to the south and west being the Annamites subject to the complicated communal *régime* of Annam, while to the north and east is an assemblage of various peoples and tribes designated by the name of

Muongs,[1] who do not belong specially to any one, these races being generally under the feudal *régime*. Annamites and Muongs meet at the market of Cho-Bo, the former having, like their neighbours the Chinese, much greater commercial aptitude than the latter, who, apart from the produce of their fields and of the chase, merely sell a few inferior iron implements, or horses. The people of the Delta, moreover, affect the utmost contempt for the inhabitants of the highlands, the most important Muong chief being regarded by my "boys" as scarcely worthy of being spoken to, and I find myself constantly being compelled to call them to order in this respect.

M. Vacle is most anxious to give us all the information he can about the natives, with whom he is so well acquainted, but ethnography is not the only science which might be enriched by new facts at Cho-Bo, and there is a fine field there for the lover of natural history. Without leaving the post-house, I notice a cage filled with small monkeys of what is known as the sleeping variety. Hanging from the bars of the cage, rolled up like balls, they have a very singular appearance, especially when they have been woke up and look with a scared air out of their big round eyes. Despite their small proportions, their skin is valued in the country as being worth at least fifteen piastres, because the hairs, as we are told, serve to heal wounds, and it is curious to find a similar belief being prevalent among the negroes of the Gaboon. We are told, too, of a maned antelope to be found among the rocks, which, I take it, is none other than the *Nemorrhadus*.

[1] Meaning, literally, provincials.

In the way of birds I come across some Euflocomas, and M. Vacle tells me that he has seen specimens of the celebrated and extremely rare Rheinart pheasant, which appears to extend thus far, and a promise is made to try and secure me one.

From all I can see and hear, and from what is told me, the fauna of the surrounding mountains must be full of interest, all the more so because it has not been studied at all, and I am so eager to be at work.

So M. Vacle's proposal to make a few days' excursion, pending the arrival of the canoes, is readily accepted, Charles remaining behind to make collections with Baptiste and Thou, who has already been initiated into the secrets of butterfly catching.

Upon the morning of the 26th, M. Vacle, M. Bounam his assistant, several "boys," two Annamite interpreters, Yao and myself, pack ourselves as best we can into a large sampan. Yao is a curious character, who deserves a few words of introduction. Let the reader imagine a little fellow, not more than nine years of age, not much taller than a top boot, very precocious, quick as lightning, and smoking like a chimney, with a round intelligent head, surmounted by an elegant red cap, and full of affection for his second father (M. Vacle having purchased him for 16 piastres from the pirates of the highlands). Such is Yao, who is as sharp as a monkey, and is of great service to M. Vacle, notably as a spy. Already a great traveller and talking several languages without being aware of it, our little friend hears all that is said and repeats it to his master, but in what language I have not yet been able to understand. But that is of no consequence, the master and pupil understand

each other, which is the essential point, and without being aware of it Yao renders more valuable service to the French Republic than any of the interpreters of the block house. Four hours below Cho-Bo we stop on the right bank at Phuong'-Lam, our horses having been sent forward with some sharpshooters by boat. Several chiefs have come to meet us dressed in robes of brown silk and barefooted. They are rather above the average height, with fair complexion and prominent cheek bones, but the foreheads do not recede so much as those of the Annamites, and most of them wear a short beard, which tends to give them a more energetic appearance. At Phuong'-Lam, as M. Vacle tells us, the chief is celebrated for his remarkably well-trained dogs, two of which act as keepers for the rest. At a given time troughs are put down for the pack, upon the beating of the tam-tam each animal takes up his place in front of his portion, but it is only upon the second stroke of the tam-tam he is allowed to touch it. We had not however time to wait and see this done, as we were obliged to mount our horses and get on. The weather is magnificent and the sun warm without being too hot, so that we have not put on our sun helmets, large felt hats with a handkerchief underneath them being sufficient to protect us. For my own part I feel myself quite at home on horseback, and with my saddle-bag filled with different articles which may be useful on the road, my rifle slung across my shoulder, my revolver, my compass, my barometer and my thermometer, everything strikes me as being very familiar, and I feel tempted to call out to my former companions in Thibet to ask them if we are not still in some corner

of Central Asia. A house of a kind which is quite new to me, in front of which we halt, brings me back to reality. It is the kind of building that we shall meet with everywhere in Indo-China except in the deltas—a single storey, which is reached by a ladder or outward staircase, is built upon piles to a height generally varying from five-and-a-half to six feet. This arrangement enables the inmates to have their stable and their poultry house and even to tie up their horses just beneath them, so that they are more easily protected from wild animals; this elevation above the ground in a measure preserves them from the emanations of fever, which often arise from the moisture. The construction is either rectangular or is formed of buildings arranged on three sides of a square. The roof is thatched, the walls consisting either of planks or of bamboo, closely interwoven, which are kept in their places by beams, and the wooden flooring is covered with bamboo mats, while in the houses of the chiefs a slightly raised portion has a small table upon which tea is served to visitors. At the other end of the apartment a square space covered with slabs cemented together with beaten earth serves as a fireplace, and the smoke makes its way up to the roof, the beams of which are quite blackened. The sides of the room instead of being perpendicular to each other and to the floor, in many cases form slightly obtuse angles, the upper part being thus slightly broader than the lower part, thus making corners in which the inmates deposit or hang up provisions of all kinds, without encroaching

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tea with our host we make a fresh start, forming a long caravan, for in addition to our boys, our interpreters, and several sharpshooters that we have brought with us, the chiefs precede us on horseback. Our baggage is carried by people of the country by means of long bamboos which they sling between them over their shoulders. About twenty armed natives follow us wearing a vest loose down to the belt, reminding one of the Chinese "Makouazere," wide baggy trousers, short at the knees, and small turban round the head, with the feet bare and the calves of the legs bound with strips of cloth. Into the belt is thrust a double-edged knife with a wooden sheath resembling in shape a Japanese sword. Their rifles are long and light, with a narrow well-polished barrel and short stock. They do not shoulder them in firing, but place them against the cheek with the fuse rolled round their arm like a bracelet, and the end of it, which burns very slowly, lighted. Imperfect as this weapon is they are very good shots. Our caravan winds in a long file along a lake surrounded by reeds, in the middle of which a narrow path has been worn. Upon the shores of this lake swarm a number of blue moorhens with red legs, which are easily domesticated, and which, when left near the houses, mount guard like the geese of the Capitol. Upon reaching the foot of the hills we have great difficulty in making the climb through thick underwood in deep mud and over slippery rocks, the horses, their riders having dismounted, being left to themselves, displaying great agility. The vigorous vegetation intercepts the light, notably the enormous India-rubber trees loaded with parasites, the ferns, the lycopodes and the

orchids. One feels one's self to be very petty beneath these giants of the tropics, which seem to crush one with their immense height, and we are very impatient to reach the summit, after having sweated, blown, and struggled for an hour or more. A climb of this kind quite explains the power of the pirates, for what chance has a column of a hundred men against ten who know the country and can select their own hiding-places? In order to be master of this district the only method is that resorted to by M. Vacle, namely, to have the chiefs on your side, and play the one off against the other.

The table-land on to which we find our way through a forest of reeds, which in many cases are eighteen feet high, consists in part of vast, uncultivated regions, with undulating ground covered with half-burnt herbage, in part of rice fields, the latter being mostly situated in the hollows formed by the chalk cliffs which alternate with the round mounds of the same formation. There are a few clumps of trees upon the hills, while upon the slopes are several long slits which remind one of the ear of Denys of Syracuse.

The bare and deserted region is the one we traverse first, and as we proceed the road widens and gets pretty good, little being required to make it available for wheel traffic.

M. Vacle thinks that cattle might be bred here with success, and I quite share his views, as there is no lack of space and the pasturages appear to be good.

A small native post has been established upon the hill, the mode of defence, adapted to the country,

consisting of a palisade with very pointed tips, behind which is a ditch, across this latter being laid bamboos pointed outwards, and serving for loopholes. All round are spiked railings, made of hard pointed bamboos, while in the centre is a mirador (covered balcony) raised upon four posts and provided with a ladder.

We make but a short halt here, as it is late, and during the last part of the journey I amuse myself, by watching little Yao, who, though he has been more than twelve miles, is still inclined to run on ahead, with the bell tied to his pigtail jingling. When he has got a little way in advance he will sit down and take a piece of hollow bamboo, and put some tobacco into it, as the Chinese do, inhaling the smoke as he trots along, and puffing it out very gradually.

Nor is this the only interesting spectacle which we have to divert us, for, to those who have their eyes about them there is no such thing as a dull stage in a journey through a new country, and among new people. One of the mandarins, with a bell-shaped straw hat, thinks that he is in the height of fashion because he is wearing a bath-towel as a mantle, while behind him comes a rod-bearer reminding one of the lictors of ancient Rome, the quiver which he has slung round his shoulder containing the wands, which are an emblem of command, and the small flags which are used to transmit orders.

Upon reaching Caophong, our halting place, we are conducted to the house of the chief, who is to put us up, and the interior is very clean. We are

escorted to the raised platform, where a repast is served us in an infinity of small dishes, while, facing us, above an altar covered with pots containing peacock feathers and scented bits of wood, are long inscriptions in Chinese, this being the altar of the ancestors. Prayers on behalf of relatives and practices relating to spirits comprise the whole religious worship of the natives in this district, to which Buddhism has not yet penetrated.

Our host is a *quamlong* or village chief, and as the country is under the feudal *régime*, the quamlongs are independent of each other, but they nearly all recognize a certain vassaldom with regard to the Zinhs, the family of which formerly governed Tonkin. The tribute paid to Annam was very small, the Court of Hué scarcely making its yoke felt, and merely requiring the Muongs to furnish a certain number of soldiers, who were very much dreaded until the use of our long-range guns became known. This year we have exempted the chiefs from taxation, upon condition of their making roads, and they seem to have taken their task quite to heart, despite the difficulties of all kinds which they are constantly encountering.

The term of Muong which is applied to them is not quite accurate, for it means, strictly speaking, "provincial," but it is not a term of reproach, like that of Moïs (savage). This latter name seems to be reserved for certain tribes disseminated over various parts of Tonkin, especially half way up the mountains. The natives of this part style themselves Thos-dān, which means strictly speaking inhabitants of the earth (*tho*), but they are often

called *Thos*, short. There is a great similarity between this name and that of Hos, which is given to the Chinese of the highlands, and also between that of Thaï, Thou, Theugon, which is the denomination of a whole race. But I shall have another opportunity of dealing in more detail with the still obscure question of the Indo-Chinese races.

In reply to our interrogations, the *thos* chiefs assert that their people have always been settled here, and that they have not come by a series of migrations.

The Annamites, as our interpreter, whom I shrewdly suspect of not being any too pure in blood, tells me, are a cross between the Chinese and the Moïs. I don't know whether this view, which would reflect upon their national pride, would be much appreciated by our boys, and moreover the historical information given by the natives possesses little scientific value, unless backed up by corroborative evidence. Still it is well to disregard no sort of information, and my plan is to question as much as possible, for in time light is certain to spring from a comparison of the documentary and verbal evidence accumulated.

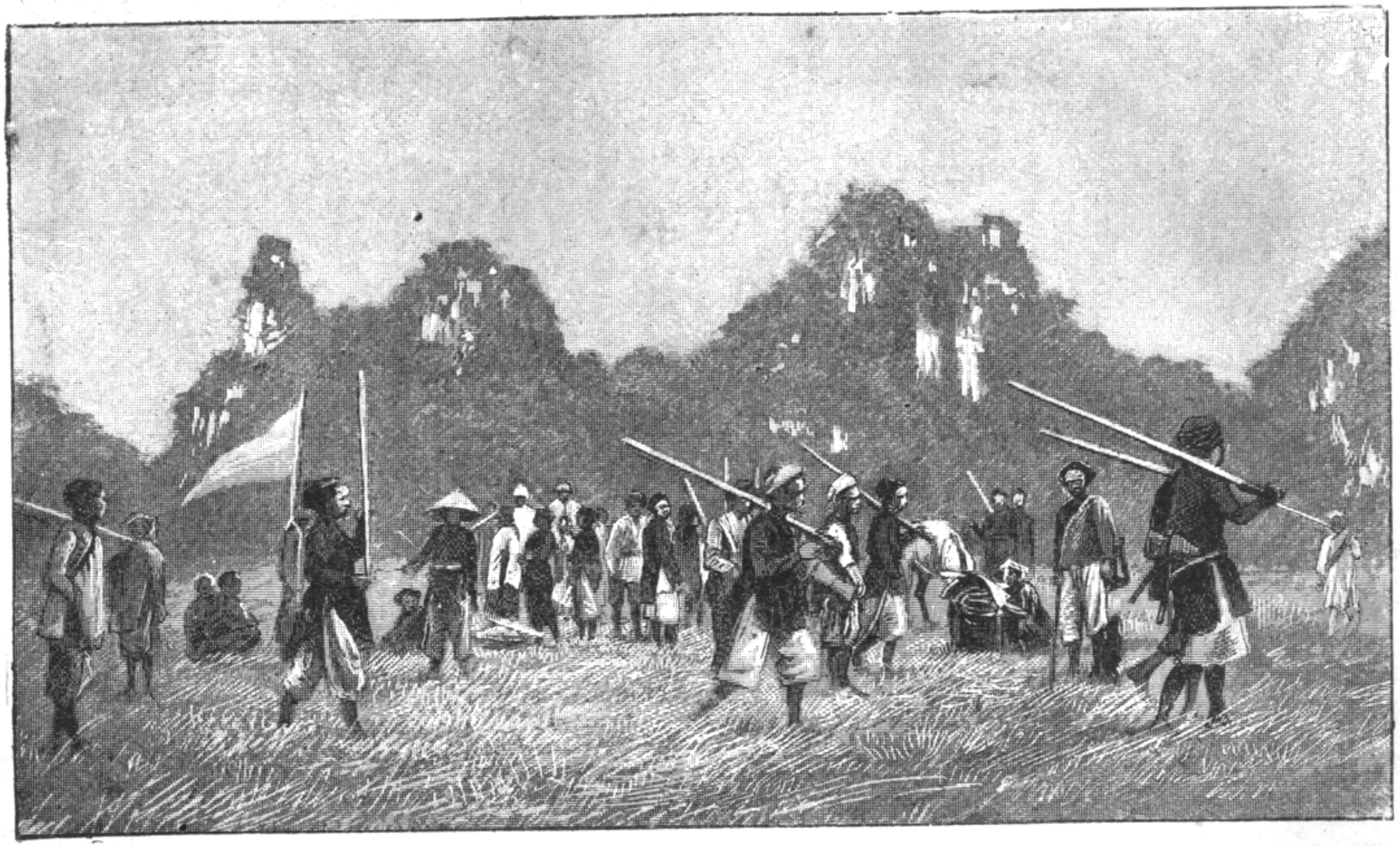
While we are discussing these ethnographical problems, our men are talking. as they sit round the fire, to the women who are getting the food ready. The Muong women, with their big, round heads, the weather-beaten aspect of which is in sharp contrast to the whiteness of their arms and chests, can scarcely be called pretty. Instead of wearing Annamite turbans, they use a dark silk handkerchief as a head-covering, the dress being held up by a large

embroidered belt coming up to the throat, while the breasts, generally bare, are occasionally concealed by a small, short tunic. They very soon go off to the other end of the house, while we are soon fast asleep.

*January 27th.*

We continue our march over the same plateau, where the uncultivated spaces alternate with rice-fields, overhung here and there by blocks of chalk. The route, which has been recently widened, is not sufficiently trodden at all places, and, notwithstanding the bamboo hurdles laid down on the surface, our horses sink up to their chests. Several chiefs come out to meet us, and their pale faces, with a few stray hairs, are rather frank and open, and their teeth are blackened over. They always wear the same kind of dress, consisting of a violet robe, and loose trousers of white linen. Their soldiers follow them, several of these carrying their rifles reversed in sign of subjection.

Every time we pass through a village we have to stop at the house of the quamlong, and take the tea served us in very tiny cups. Before this, he makes a series of salutes, bowing several times, with folded hands, to the ground, and offering us eggs and bananas, this being meant to indicate at once his vassaldom as well as his desire to be agreeable to us. We can no more refuse to accept the present than he can to offer it, these being two obligations which cannot be omitted without bringing disrepute upon himself. Quids of rolled betel nut are offered at the same time as the



THE ESCORT BETWEEN CAOPHONG AND THAC-BY, 27TH JANUARY, 1892

tea, but I do not care to take any, though I am told they are very cooling to the blood.

Each visit takes about a quarter of an hour, at the most, as we must reach Thac-By by nightfall, and around some of the houses I notice high palisades of bamboos, at least eighteen feet high, filled with laths inside, while the outside is protected by sharp pointed stakes.

As we go along the road we see several squares of interwoven bamboos hanging from the top of a tall reed, each square having at one of its angles several rings one inside the other, these being intended to keep off the evil spirits.

The village of Thac-By was celebrated at the time of the conquest of Tonkin, and up to 1887 it was occupied by the Black Flags, who directed their incursions into the Song-Bo from there.

They have now been all driven off, and the country is quite quiet. The neighbourhood is a very pretty one, clumps of flower-bearing trees of white camellias reaching a height of over sixteen feet, areca-nut trees and cocoa trees surrounding the houses, while the last rays of the sun, reflected by the rice-fields, play among their foliage. It is a peaceful scene as the natives come in from the fields with their animals, and as the bright-plumaged birds flit about among the trees, and the two hours which we spend there before nightfall pass all too quickly.

The chief who accords us his hospitality belongs to the ancient sovereign family of the Zinhs, and his age and origin secure for him deep respect on all sides, while, on account of his influence, it is our interest to gain his attachment, so that the visit

which M. Vacle has induced his nephew to pay to Cho-Bo is regarded as a great success.

During dinner the old gentleman is quite ready to answer our questions, and I take advantage of this to interrogate him as to the mode of burying the dead which prevails in his territory. He tells us that the bodies are placed in wooden coffins with a layer of ashes under the body, and wadding over it, the whole being carefully closed down. Then, instead of placing it in the earth, they keep it in their houses for months, or even years, and one quamlong whom I visit has had his mother's body in his room for twenty-two months. Sometimes this is done in order to select a propitious moment for burial; in other cases, it is because the family is poor, and is saving up enough money to celebrate becoming funeral rites. As long as the body is in the house the relatives are expected to be in mourning, which is not confined to a change of raiment but extends to abstention from chewing betel nut, or listening to singing women, in addition to which they do not sit on red mats, wear handsome robes, smoke, or shave the head. Such are the principal rules observed by the relatives of defunct persons.

While conversation is going on upon this not very cheerful topic, M. Vacle calls my attention to the curious shape of the piece of furniture on which we are taking our meal. It is a large coffer of yellow wood placed lengthways in a hollow made in the centre of the raised platform, and upon examining it more closely we see that it is neither more nor less than a coffin. The discovery is not a very appetizing one, but the natives reassure us, and say that the coffin is empty

and has only been placed where it is against the time of its being wanted.

While taking our meals we endeavoured to repay our hosts' politeness by offering them preserved meats and coffee in return for their little dishes and their tea, but one thing struck me very much, namely, that the chiefs abstain from eating beef. We think that this must have a common origin with the custom which prevents beef being eaten by the natives of India, but the chiefs tell us that they do not care to eat the same food as the coolies.

*January 28th.*

The night has been bad, the noise made by the horses below waking us up continually. Notwithstanding the fatigue caused by this, we must start early, as the halting place is a long way off.

The road is a good one, two yards and a half wide, and one can fancy one's self in a park as long as one keeps outside the rice plantations, where, as yesterday, our horses had great trouble in advancing.

Besides, the cultivated land ceases very soon, and we are obliged, for fear of running short of drinkable water, to stop near the last village for breakfast. Here they bring us drink in bamboo canes four yards long with pierced knobs. In helping with the preparations of the meal, I cannot help thinking of the variety and multiplicity of services rendered us by the bamboo. Does there exist on earth another plant so generally useful to humanity? I do not know of one. For my own part I could

understand primitive and simple people, divining the forces of nature, making it sacred, even worshipping it. I have seen it used for building, for defence, for clothing; the young shoots are an excellent nourishment; the sap perfumes the food; with the wood you can make saucepans, pipes, pails, canals, in fact all sorts of things! The bark transforms itself into paper; in piercing the knobs of certain varieties the natives find water; in short, with nothing but bamboo they produce fire, by striking dry stalks one against the other. One admires the startling inventions of modern science; exhibitions are opened to show the results obtained by vapour and electricity; but a place ought to be reserved for bamboo productions, and it would need be a large one.

During the rest of the day we press through jungles of tall reeds which seem to have warehoused an excess of heat; fires lighted amidst the dry herbs spread with rapidity, and at the same time the dull grumbling of the furious torrent; the flames lick our horses' feet; with the sun above and the fire below we are roasted both sides; and so we come upon much, and this time one meets the forests and their freshness at the same time with all the more pleasure.

Towards evening, we reach the edge of the plateau above the valley of S-ang-Bo; the view is splendid, the spectacle grand, the Black River unrolls itself at our feet, broad and tranquil, between high wooded hills; we overlook the valley, and can fancy we are close down upon the shore; it seems as though we had barely a hundred metres descent to reach it, the

affair of a few minutes ; but we are, alas ! the objects of an illusion.

However, we get down at last, and the aged native at whose place we quench our thirst, having fulfilled the duties of hospitality, returns to the occupation from which we had diverted him. With much kneeling, accompanied by prayers, he renders homage to the manes of his ancestors, to whom he has offered small presents, small pieces of perfumed wood, milk, quids of betel, fruits and dainties.

We cannot leave Cho-Bo, where we arrived for dinner last night, for two days ; and although this delay is vexing, we must resign ourselves to it. The 30th is the Tesson, the first day of the Annamite year ; and it is useless even to think of doing anything with the natives during this feast. Women, soldiers, merchants, boys, every one is up, and from dawn the noise begins ; the air is infected by the never-ceasing fireworks ; for a few sapèques our boys buy themselves chaplets of Chinese crackers that they bring and burn before our door, thinking no doubt they are honouring us greatly ; the garrison are regaled by M. Vacle, who offers them a bullock, and a jar of tchoum-tchoum (rice brandy), they eat and drink all day, and at night they are nearly all tipsy.

During these festivities I am looking after my collections, killing several birds and catching some butterflies. The small islets of the river are teeming with otters, but though we set several snares we do not succeed in catching any, nor are we more fortunate with the porcupines up in the hills.

However, we are soon out of the Têt, and all that

we have to do is to get our baggage on board. At the very foot of the hill above Cho-Bo, the channel of the stream narrows very much and the waters dash tumultuously against the chaos of the gray rocks, twisting round them and forcing a passage with all the impetuosity of a torrent. These are rapids which might, if necessary, be passed through by an ordinary boat, but, as a rule, the boats, in order to avoid any risk, are stopped either above or below according as to whether they are descending or going up the river. Those by which we are to travel are waiting for us up stream, having been sent down to us from the highlands by Deo Van Tri, a powerful landowner, whose name will be constantly recurring. The boat-men are from Caïchau, tall, energetic men, with open countenances, instinct with cheerfulness and frank-ness, very much in contrast with the underhand looks of nearly all the Annamites.

They fraternize with M. Vacle and empty a glass of tchoum-tchoum with him, as he is an old ac-quaintance of theirs, and while most of them are going to row us up, two of them are to go on to China and fetch priests for the ceremonies to be performed in honour of the defunct father of Deo Van Tri.

The Laï chief has, by a contract with the French Protectorate, secured the transport service on the Black River, with a fixed charge per man, per boat or per weight. His interests are looked after at Cho-Bo, by a Chinese representative, and it is by him that our baggage is weighed, this operation being performed by means of large Chinese scales hanging from a transversal post held up by two men

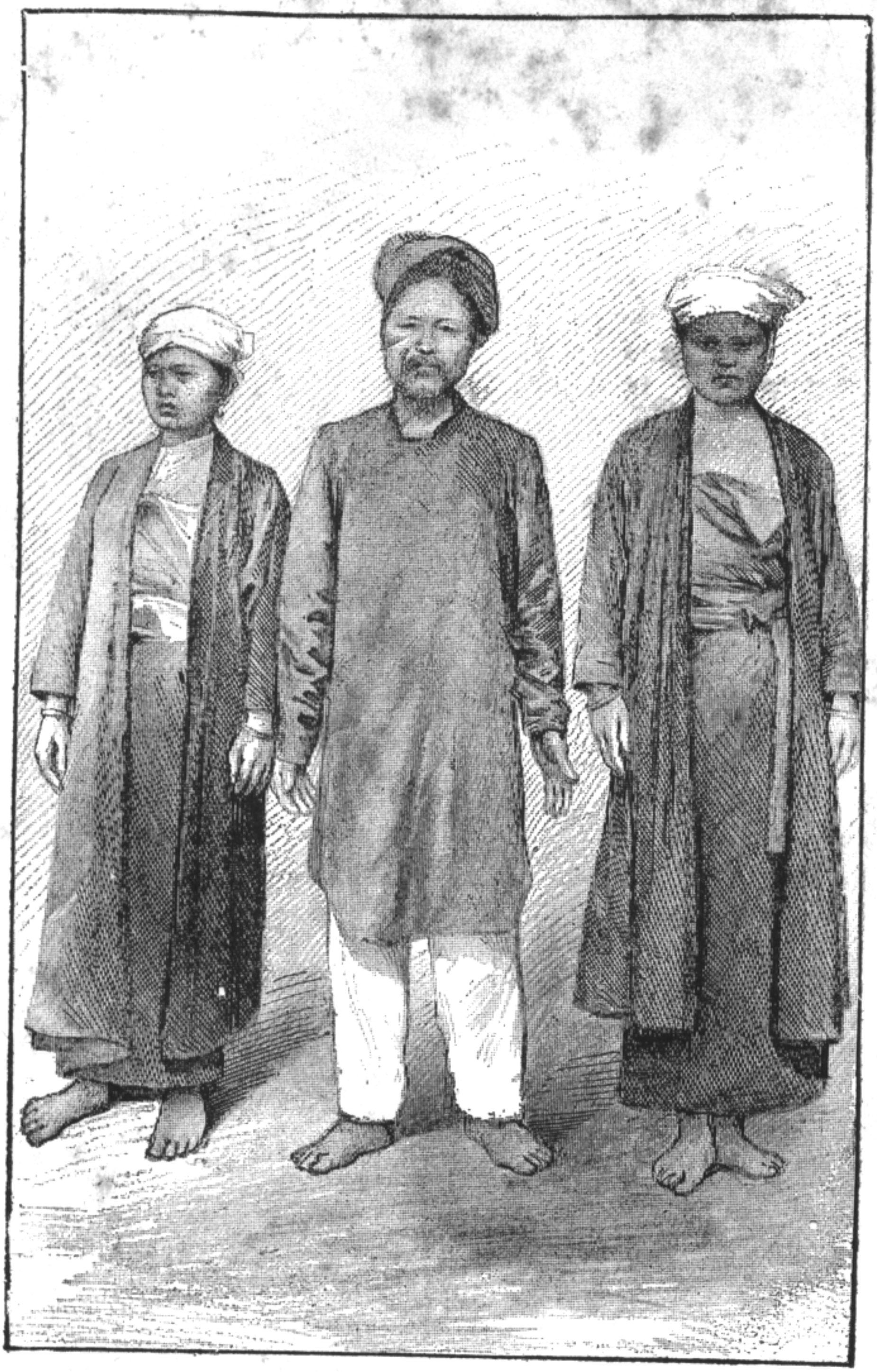
The luggage having been stowed away, all we have to do is to get on board. Five canoes are sufficient for our accommodation, the longest measuring about thirty-three feet by five, with wooden hulls running to a point and elevated at the two extremities, reminding one somewhat of a gondola. At the stern is a round wicker cage containing a cock, placed there either to be eaten one day or to be offered as a sacrifice to the evil spirits. Underneath this is a small, short steering-wheel, the handle of which is left in its place between the feet of the helmsman. The boat is not very deep in the water, as there are certain passages which can only be got through with very little draught, while the baggage is stowed in the bottom, and mats are arranged to enable us to sit down, and, for the greater part of the time, to lie at full length, the covering of twisted bamboo being so low that we can scarcely sit upright even with our legs crossed Turkish fashion. We must, however, try and make ourselves as comfortable as possible, for it is slow work going up stream, and we shall have to spend several weeks in this uncomfortable residence. We get on pretty well, however, and travel teaches one to be industrious, and, with our mattresses in the fore part of the boat, our rifles, carbines, and revolvers hung up at our sides on iron hooks, we are not so badly off, if a trifle short of room. But we are protected from the sun above, and from the moisture beneath, with plenty to occupy us and enough to eat.

Outside the covering are the men, two upon each side, all of them being provided with a bamboo pole thirteen or sixteen feet long, with an iron tip. The

oars are rarely employed, and they are rather short and flat at the ends, not being lifted out of the water when they are in use.

One canoe is occupied by myself and the interpreter, the latter being a tall, thin Chinaman, with a pale complexion and regular features, who is very good-looking and, as we are told, a great favourite with the ladies. The new wife of Cho-Ken, as he is called, was formerly an Annamite courtesan, and he has left her at Cho-Bo, while he himself, formerly an interpreter of Deo Van Tri, has come down to seek employment at Hanoï, being for the present attached to the commissary at Cho-Bo. Despite the repugnance which I feel for the Chinese, I am glad to have got leave to employ this one, not that I had much choice in the matter, for our boys know only a few words of the Thaï tongue. Charles and Thou are in the second canoe, while the three others convey the baggage as well as Sao and Baptiste, the latter not being very bright at present, and too much given to opium. I do not, however, despair of making something of him, and I have given him fair notice that if I catch him smoking I shall destroy all his apparatus, and to an opium smoker the loss of his pipe and lamp is rank ruin.

In addition to our own convoy, another canoe is occupied by M. Vacle and his interpreter, as he is going to accompany us for several days, and see us safe beyond a point reputed to be dangerous, where the pirates often attack the boats as they go through. Our boatmen relate how 300 Chinese, former adherents of the Black Flag band, have just made terms with the Doc-Ngu, and they say that



THE DEDOC BETWEEN HIS TWO WIVES.

the latter may find it worth his while to stop us and put us to ransom. M. Vacle, however, undertakes to see us safe into a pacific district, and I am much pleased at finding in him not only a protector, but a very pleasant companion, well posted in the manners and customs of the country.

On the morning of the 10th, after a delay caused by the distribution of poles—the boatmen being very superstitious as to the choice of these—we make a start upon the tranquil waters of the stream, which is broad enough for our canoes to proceed abreast. But M. Vacle warns me that it will not be as pleasant work as this all the way, and thinks that I shall alter my tune after having been travelling for a few days.

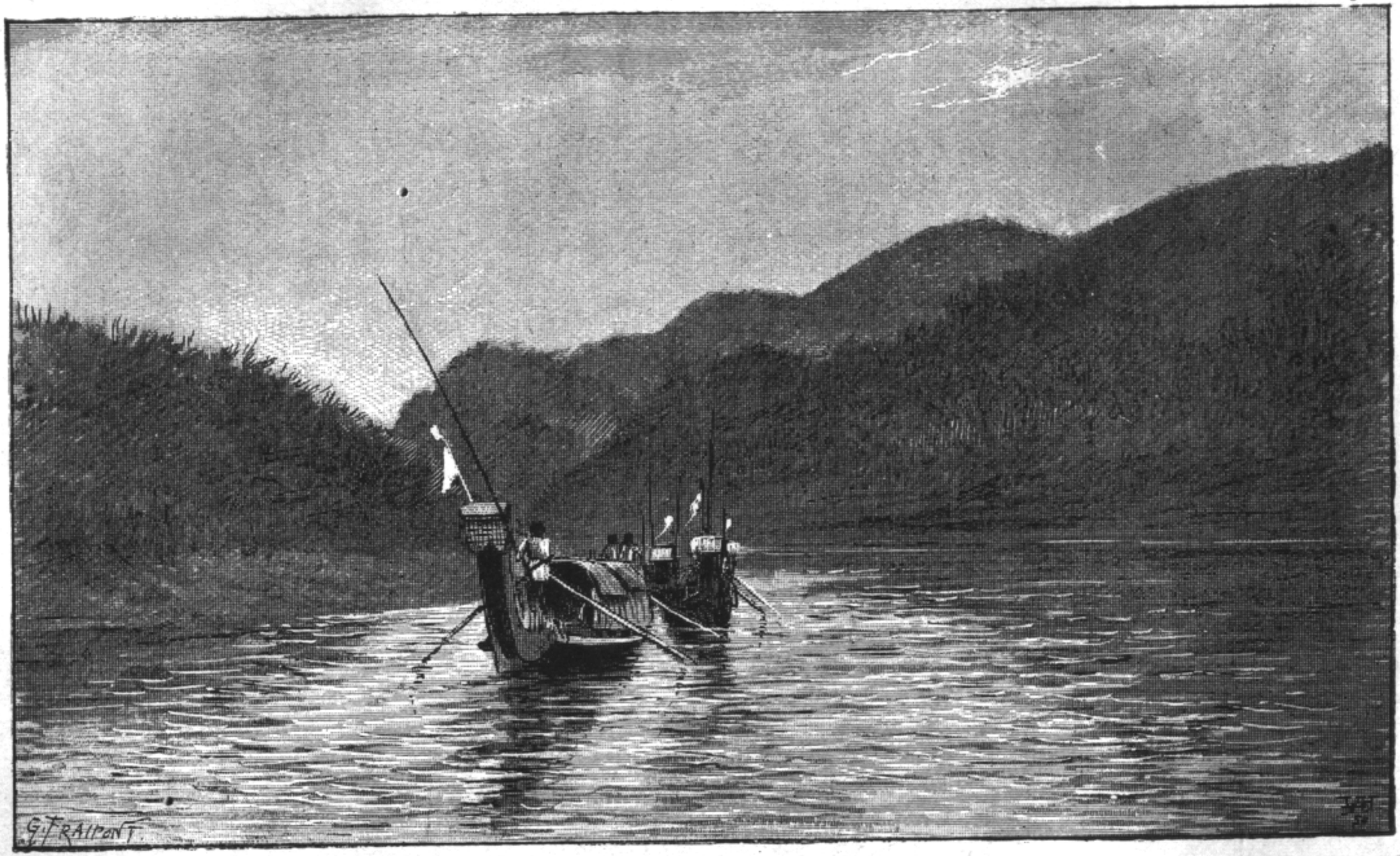
Our first stage is a short one, as we have to wait for other canoes which are conveying provisions to the posts at Van-Yen and Van-Bou, as it is better to be numerically strong in case of an attack by pirates. We halt upon the right bank, and about half an hour from the place of debarkation we reach the house of the Dedoc Dinhto, an influential chief with much the same standing as a general, who had formerly been a pirate and hostile to us, but who has now made his submission. It is important that we should see him before we continue our journey, and we find him, physically, a man of medium height, resolute in aspect and with a face made all the sterner by the sword cut which has pierced his cheek. Residing as a rule at Cho-Bo, he is at present celebrating the "Têt" at his country house, and the festivities appear to have been very animated, as he is decidedly the worse for drink. I succeed, however, in getting him

photographed between two of his wives, who are fat, pasty-faced women, dressed in long brown tunics, with embroidered skirts and belts and white handkerchiefs on their heads. The Dedoc, after having made us a military salute, takes his place between his two wives, with his arms close to his side, his two hands open; and a pleased expression on his face. His villa is only slightly raised above the level of the soil, instead of being on piles, while in the courtyard we notice a curious wooden dovecote.

We halt a few miles further up the next day, upon the same bank of the river, at the village of Ben-Mo, not far from which place, at Su-Yut, are to be seen veins of coal along the sides of a rivulet. It appears to be hard and of indifferent quality, but in order to form an opinion as to the value of the strata we should have to make excavations for which we cannot spare the time.

In the villages we pass through the women are busy cooking cakes for the fêtes which succeed the "Têt," and on the palisades are hung very fine swoop nets, the lower ends of which are studded with leaden tresses, &c., bound to each other. In front of the dwellings are squares of woven bamboos, attached to the ends of poles and intended to drive away the evil spirits, and these we come across everywhere, though some of the chiefs use instead an ordinary triangle.

In the course of the day we come to a small rapid formed by the accumulation of stones, and the boatmen jump into the water and push each canoe through, while further on our canoes are hauled along by a rope, or rather by a trolly about 100 feet long. We then halt at Ngoe-Tro, the starting point of a road




ON THE BLACK RIVER BELOW VAN-YEN, FEBRUARY 3RD, 1892.

which leads after a two days' march to Songella, and our only capture is a large water turtle.

*February 3rd.*

Our men inform us that if we are to be attacked, it will be to-day, for the chief of the village has seen a crow that has croaked three times, and that is a bad sign. The boatmen, however, are pretty easy in their minds, the presence of Monsieur Vacle inspiring them with more confidence than that of the ten Muong soldiers armed with flint locks who have been told off for us. The chalk cliffs are succeeded by hills, the sides of which are not so steep, these latter being clothed with forests in which the painter would find every possible shade of green. The trees are some of them very big and majestic, others slender and elegant, from the gigantic "ficus" with its whitened trunk to the bamboos whose delicate featherings lend a silky down to the slopes which they cover. The river is over two hundred feet broad, and winds about to such an extent that it seems as if one were shut in by some large lake, while the villages are very far apart, in most cases hidden in the woods. M. Vacle calls a halt at the residence of a small chief whom we consult with respect to the pirates. He says, "If you insist upon it, I will be answerable for the road being safe, but I cannot guarantee for the canoes that may come later on." It is not for us to ask him in what way he can guarantee our freedom from attack, we have merely to accept the situation. This quamlong wears a jade bracelet on his left arm, and many of the chiefs wear silver rings. He is smoking a "hubble-bubble,"

and keeps his tobacco in a small silver jar suspended by a chain from his waist. We are told that he is a man of wealth, and that he has at home a Japanese woman, probably purchased at Hanoï. Poor little Madame Chrysanthème, where are the *tchayas youm sakés*, the *ghétas*, and the little bits of paper? "*Arimasen*" (there are none), you would reply with a smile. You do not regret your own country, for you carry it with you, and in the recesses of the Muong hut you certainly have placed a portrait of Fousi-Yama, surrounded by a few flowers which are lighted up for you by the sun of Tokio. The irrigation is very well carried out in the fields; numerous small canals have been cut, these canals being regularly filled with water by a sort of long wooden spoon which moves on a pivot and is set automatically in motion by the weight of the water. A native woman suffering from some complaint is being douched without taking any notice of the passers by, but as soon as she sees me she takes to flight. In the course of the afternoon the hills we pass are more steep, and are succeeded by chalk cliffs rising to a height of 300 feet. In some places they overhang the route, forming a projection, or else stalactites covered with moss as with a green carpet. In the hollows may be seen small palm trees glistening with moisture and stretching out their green arms over us as if to salute us on our way. The channel must be pretty deep, for the water is smooth, and in many places very dark, the crests of the cliffs on each side not being more than 150 feet apart. We come upon several more of these long and deep passages similar to those we saw before reaching Cho-bo. They appear to have been

caused by some great geological disturbance, or by a fissure possibly brought about in the calcareous mass by the weight of water from the mountains. The formation does not seem to have been gradual but rather the result of some violent phenomenon. The cliffs appear at this point as if they had been abruptly torn asunder, for they correspond to each other; the projections upon one side fit in as it were to the hollow of the other, so much so that one might fancy that the work was that of man.

While I am making these reflections we have crossed the limit which divides the two provinces, and at the same time the dangerous passage where the boats are exposed to an attack from the pirates from above. All that we now have to do is to be on our guard against the dangers of the stream, for the rapids are so numerous that I cannot mention them all, there often being as many as twenty in the course of the day. They are however not so dangerous in going up the river as in coming down, when the least error in steering would send the boat on to the rocks with the force of the current. They are always to be dreaded, though less so at this season than in the summer, when the sudden flushes are terrific; the river being inaccessible for several days at a time, there is little hope then for those that have been unable to find shelter, and whole convoys of more than fifteen canoes have been carried off and have disappeared in a single night. As a rule nearly all those that have navigated in these waters have come to grief at least once, as the members of the Pavie Mission know to their cost. M. Vacle went down the stream a good deal faster than he wanted to go, holding on to the roof of the canoe, which

was three parts under water, and only owing his life to a lucky chance, this experience being one that he was not at all anxious to repeat. There being no village for us to halt at, the men pass the night on a sand bank. They are not long in running themselves up a shelter with bamboos and palm leaves, and the fires being lighted and the *pot-au-feu* got ready we converse more cheerfully than we did in the morning, when our boys, and especially our interpreters, felt the reverse of easy. Now they make light of the pirates, having got out of danger. We are told that the Doc-Ngu is very powerful, that at a sign from him 2,000 men would leap to arms, that ten chiefs are ready to do his bidding, that a sorcerer accompanies him and tells him during each expedition the propitious moment for the chances of success by immolating a fowl and examining its claws, this being regarded as an infallible test. They are not agreed as to the outcome of our journey, reports being current that Deo Van Tri had been assassinated by the Siamese that were in his service, and that the occurrence had been kept secret out of fear of an invasion from Laos. It is rumoured also that the highlands are in a very disturbed state; but I know with what reserve stories of this kind are to be credited, and I shall get to learn the truth later on.

I take advantage of the friendly disposition of our staff to endeavour to get information as to the customs and religious creeds of the country, and the interpreter of M. Vacle, excited by a drop of tchoum-tchoum, proposes by way of winding up the evening, to tell us a story, which was much as follows:—

"Two crabs had got married, and while the female

was changing her shell, the male kept guard at the entrance to the hole; the female then comes out, makes a sign to another male crab and 'carries on with him.' A fisherman, having noticed this, related it to the king, and the latter determined to ascertain whether it is the same with humanity, and whether the men are better than the women. He accordingly published an edict promising a large reward to any man who would kill his wife. One husband accepted the proposal, being assured of impunity. But upon going home he found his wife and children in tears, and sooner than put the former to death he delivered himself up to the king, who had him cast into prison.

"A fresh edict was then issued in favour of wives against husbands. One wife undertakes to kill her husband, has him decapitated and his head brought to the court. The king then sees that women are worse than men, has her head cut off and gives a handsome reward to the husband who has been cast into prison."

This native story kept us up rather late, and the silence around the camp is broken by the hoarse roaring of the big stags which come down to drink; upon several crests of the hills fires are lighted, while others are seen in the valley, and we wonder whether these can be the signals used by the pirates to correspond with one another.

*February 4th.*

The rapids are very frequent, so that we do not make much progress, the canoes having to be pushed

up one by one and all the men being required for each canoe. But as soon as they have got past the rapid, they stop to fill a hubble-bubble, passing it round to each other, while others go in search of a sort of long grasshopper which they collect for food. It is no use hurrying them, for they must be given time to blow, so that it often takes two hours to advance a hundred yards. I employ the interval in trying to measure the speed of the rapids by means of small floating bits of wood, but the operation is a difficult one, and it gives the average speed at about 190 feet a minute. I cannot pretend that it is more than approximate.

At Tac-da, one of the rapids, we learn that some canoes were attacked a few days ago, and higher up we pass a village called Ban-Thao, the quamlong (mayor) of which is a woman. That same evening a path through the woods leads me to a village with three or four huts, which seems isolated in the midst of forests and protected by high palisades. Several men came out as soon as they saw me and made signs for me to retrace my steps, but whether they took me for a pirate or not, I cannot say. But in any case, I think it best to take the hint. In the course of my excursion I have encountered two very curious kinds of cemeteries, in the first of which each burial-place is marked by a small bamboo railing surrounding. a rectangular space; in the centre there is a double thatched roof with hanging ropes in front to protect the tomb, which is itself of beaten earth, with three saucers placed above it, while, on the ground at the side are a number of faggots and bamboo cages. I only

is gained by a narrow path. In the case of other graves there is neither a roof nor any sort of offering, but around the raised mound of earth there is a circle of straight stones, none more than sixteen inches long, except those placed lengthways at the two ends, these being often as much as forty inches. They remind me of the Druidic monuments in Brittany; and in Central Asia also stones are much used in the cemeteries. The idea of raising up stones in honour of the dead suggests itself, moreover, very naturally to the mind without drawing from it any conclusion as to a similarity of usage among different races. In this instance, perhaps, the palisades and roofs belong only to the chiefs, or are intended to mark the difference of creeds, unless indeed it is a mere matter of hazard; this being a question which I must leave to more competent travellers than myself to determine.

*February* **5th.**

After a night of wind and rain, we make a start in gloomy weather, which clears up as the day advances, and at twelve o'clock the thermometer stands at 68° F.

We meet some canoes conveying a lieutenant, a sergeant, and about forty linhs, who are in search of pirates that had attacked the last convoy of boats. The officer has disguised his men as *uhaques*, or peasants, in order to surprise the enemy, and we wish them good luck as we pass.

The river opens out and the hills melt into the plain, to our right being accumulations of stones and pebbles, while in front is a lofty plain, the bank form-

ing as it were a T of which the river would be the axis. When the tide is high the stones are covered, but the bank, now some seventeen or twenty feet high, is upon the level of the river and appears to be washed by an immense lake.

The spot is well selected for a post which commands the valley, and this is Van-Yen. We have just met a part of the garrison upon an expedition, and when at its full strength it consists of about forty Muong sharpshooters and fifty Annamites. The first-named are not so often sick as the latter, and although the men of the two races do not assimilate, they do not quarrel. Several non-commissioned officers do the honours of the blockhouse, a small white building in a poor state of repair, covered with inscriptions in French and Chinese. The Annamite and Muong villages, situated at the back, are quite distinct from each other. Further on, the valley of Phou-Yen, fertile and filled with villages for a distance equivalent to three days' march, opens up, but despite the richness of the district the inhabitants have little to complain of attacks from the pirates, these attacks being rare and very partial. But here, as lower down, the Doc-Ngu inspires great terror, for if he took a fancy to the Phou-Yen he would put the post in a very precarious position, for what could a garrison of less than 100 men do against his formidable band?

As for ourselves we are pretty well at ease in this respect, for which we cannot sufficiently thank M. Vacle, my only regret being that his duties, which enable him to render such valuable services to the French Government, prevent him from going further with us; and he himself, who is devoted to travel,

said, with tears in his eyes, how sorry he was, but "la France avant tout!" These words will bring us good luck, for we, too, have but one object in view, to contribute towards the greatness of our country. It is only when one is far away that one appreciates the charm of meeting compatriots whose hearts beat in unison with one's own.

We shall miss little Yao, whose reflections imbued with scepticism so amused me. As long as he had enough to eat and a lodging for himself and his papa (M. Vacle), he was indifferent to all the rest, especially as to religious matters, about which he had no time to think, and he would say very often, "Buddha same thing as bamboo."

A few hours after the departure of M. Vacle and Yao for Cho-Bo, on the morning of February 5th, we make another start, having laid in a fresh stock of provisions, with rice for the boatmen at the rate of 11 lbs. per day for four men. In order to avoid all discussion between the garrison and the natives, the colonel in command of the region has fixed the price of rice at the rate of about 7*s.* a cwt. We also have some fresh fish, and I have provided myself with about fifty cartridges containing Fané powder, which produces the same effect as dynamite without the risk of explosion. One of these, provided with a percussion cap, with a fuse burning under the water and weighted with a stone, is very serviceable to us. The effect of the explosion is felt over a radius of ten feet, and as soon as the bubbling of the water subsided the fish which had been killed rose to the surface stomach upwards, our men being eager to jump in and bring

strongly to be recommended to all travellers in this district, for they do not take up much room, they do not effect much damage in large rivers, and they procure at a reasonable price food which is much appreciated by the coolies.

We encounter several rapids to-day, one of which is named the Cho-Bo bar, with a very narrow canal and a swift current, something like eighty feet in fourteen seconds; and while we are being hauled up I teach Thou how to catch the butterflies, which are very numerous about here, having first made a net out of the muslin used for mosquito curtains and a little wire.

Our boatmen watch us with astonishment, for they are more practical, and only collect what is good to eat, such, for instance, as the leaves of a small shrub called *Moleun*, which they pound and cook like spinach, or a green plant which, after having been boiled and strongly flavoured with pimento, is eaten with rice.

They are a very good sort of people these natives of Laï, for I notice that they are often laughing, and that they never quarrel, sitting round the fire and singing with a nasal twang, or playing soft tunes with an instrument made of reeds and fitted into a cocoa-nut shell. Some of them are fishing and laying down lines for the night, and they are adepts at casting to a great distance their hook by means of a bamboo with a large ring at the end of it.

Although they are always later to bed than we are they are up before us, and the only halt they make during the day is for an hour at breakfast time, and I ask myself how they contrive to do with so little

sleep. Perhaps they make up for it when they are at home.

Fires are not completely put out, for there are plenty of fresh traces of tigers about. Nor is there any lack of stags, but we can only hear them, without getting a shot, as they are concealed in the tall reeds which line the river banks. Young Thou says that there are many more further on, and I am glad to let this young Annamite rattle on, as he is a very curious type, with his broad forehead, his straight nose, broad at the base, his thick lips constantly being curled up, his demure smile, and two fine rows of white teeth. He has long narrow eyes, with scarcely any trace of eyebrows and a head of black hair which he throws back like a Robespierre. When he is speaking to the boatmen, you might think that he was surprised at finding himself opening his lips to such inferior persons, but when he is talking to us or is in fear of being called over the coals, you might take him for a martyr; with all this, he is not in the least vicious, and though he has little muscular strength, he is very inured to fatigue. Vain as a man, proud of his race, industrious, particular about his dress, fond of gambling, and honest, such are the contradictory characteristics of this eccentric personage, who would puzzle the most consummate psychologist and who was brought into the world at Hanoï by the wife of an Annamite tailor in the year of grace 1866.

Despite his youth Thou has already travelled a good deal, having been "boy" at Langson, and after that, when in the service of Mr. Macey, he travelled through the whole of upper Tonkin, the Sibsompanas, and Laos. Luang Prabang dwells in his memory as a sort

of paradise which he hopes to regain, and he tells us that he has left part of his heart behind him there.

Sac is quite a different type. Tall, thin, and angular of countenance, he is not at all communicative; he does his allotted work very well, but at times he is not so easy to manage as his comrade, for, having hitherto led an untrammeled life in the delta, keeping himself with the produce of the chase, he cannot readily bend himself to discipline, and we endeavour, as far as possible, to fall in with the independence of his disposition. Despite his obstinacy, I am pleased to have engaged him, for he is a capital man to have with us on the road, being both full of courage and adept at getting one out of a difficulty. Sao is a native of the Vinh, so Thou, who is from the basin of the Red River, will not admit that he is an Annamite.

As to Baptiste, he is a good cook, but we do not like his underhand looks, and, being nearly always in a stupefied state from the effects of the opium which he smokes in secret, he excites very little sympathy; he is so negligent and lazy that we are constantly obliged to reprimand him, and if he does not mind what he is about we shall have to get rid of him.

The Chinese interpreter will, perhaps, do, though he, too, is an opium smoker. But he will not mix with the men or attempt to inform himself and take an interest in our voyage. We always have to keep on asking him the same questions, and, as he has no initiative, we can only regard him as a *pis-aller*.

*February 7th.*

This is a pretty warm day, 84 degrees in the shade, but it does not hinder us from doing the greater part of the march on foot. We do not, however, get much game, though there are plenty of traces of stags, all that we see being a few plover, some swallows, and some very large and wild kingfishers. The river winds about a great deal, with large accumulations of stone in the bends, while at the angles, between the hills and the river, there is a sort of plateau, probably formed by the accumulated deposits of long ages. There are but few villages, and we pitch our camp near a collection of some twenty houses, close to it being a cemetery similar to one which I have already described. The natives come and sell us a pineapple and a young porcupine, which is here called a mountain pig, but as we do not know what to do with it we decline to accept it.

*February 8th.*

The hills seem to be denuded upon the tops, the natives cutting down the trees for fuel, for building and for clearing land which will be suitable for rice or Indian corn. The big trees on the river bank are, however, left, in order that they may serve as shelter for the yellow-roofed houses which, emerging from the verdure, remind one of various Japanese sketches. At other points, the banana-trees,[1] with

[1] These are not, as has been stated, the plants which yield the so-called Manilla flax.

their large leaves of bright green, form a pleasing contrast to the autumnal tints of the bamboos.

The villages often consist of no more than two or three houses, built about 130 feet above the level of the river, which is here only from 250 to 400 feet wide, the rocks along its banks, which were chiefly of schist where we were yesterday, being now mainly chalk, in which I discovered several fossils. The water is clear, and in many places the bed is lined with the green weeds which our men are so pleased to gather and cook. Despite the rapids we get along at a good pace, our halting place to-day being Takoa, and we have done the distance from Van-Yen in two and a half days instead of four.

Upon the 9th we do not make a start till late, being obliged to lay in a fresh supply of provisions. Situated upon the right bank of the river, Takoa is a large village and a small commercial centre, including nine Chinese houses. These are built upon a level with the soil, and their owners trade in salt, opium, and tobacco, which they exchange for native products. Transactions in this region are facilitated by the unfettered traffic in opium, for beyond the limits of Cho-Bo there is no monopoly, and to create one would be tantamount to setting up piracy. At the present time the attacks on the canoes below Van-Yen have somewhat hampered trade. Such, at least, is the information given us by a gaunt and decrepit old Chinaman, whose livid complexion betrays his liking for opium, as he shows us the cannon and the revolvers of the *Leygue*, a steam sloop which the Pavie Mission succeeded in getting up this far, and which eventually grounded after having made

several trips. For the assistance which he rendered in saving these guns the old Chinaman was given a medal, of which he is naturally very proud.

We do not find much to buy here, excepting the nail of a rhinoceros, which, as we are told, comes from the neighbourhood and is a remedy against headaches. Our men purchase sugar-cane, bamboos, salad, fowls (a franc each) and a very large pig, which costs nearly a sovereign, or about a third less than at Hanoï, according to Thou. Payment is effected in fragments of piastres weighed in Chinese scales.

All these matters being settled, we enter upon a fresh stage, but as our men want the afternoon to kill the pig and make merry over it, and as we are well in advance of time, we do not go far, being all the more inclined to meet their wishes in that they are very handy and willing, so that we are on the best of terms together. No sooner have we reached our destination than the boats are made fast, the wood picked up, the fires lighted and the kettle put on before our lazy cook has got out of his berth. The scene to-day is a most typical one, and a more graphic pen than mine would be needed to describe it. In a few hours the pig is killed, scalded, cut up, and put on to cook, the boatmen, who are seated in circles round the fires commencing the repast at daybreak and not terminating it till nightfall. First of all they eat the blood mixed with rice and pimento, then the tripe cut up into small bits and seasoned with wild tomatoes gathered in the woods, winding up with the bacon and meat. After all this, they fetch, with great precaution, several bamboo canes which had been stowed away in the bottom of the boats and

which contained some of the spirit known as tchoum-tchoum, purchased in the morning at Takoa. We think it best to shut our eyes to all this, for it is desirable to be indulgent, upon occasions, to those who serve you well. This evening, by way of celebrating the feast, everything is in common, and even the boys condescend to share in the rejoicings.

As a rule the men dine in several detachments, one of them acting as cook for the others, those who are of the same family or from the same village clubbing together. As I watch them eat, drink, and make merry, I am tempted to wonder whether they have not discovered the secret of true happiness—very few objects of anxiety, few creeds, few desires, few wants, and little to gain or little to lose. They will leave the world as they came into it, content with what they have, living from hand to mouth, without looking beyond. It may be that their philosophy is inherent in their race and is the work of destiny, and we may well ask whether it is in the name of humanity that we thrust ourselves between them and their happiness, introducing among them the traces of a factitious civilisation, which shows them the steps that have to be climbed, but as a rule without giving them the means of ascending.

While our boatmen are preparing their feast, we take advantage of the stop to do a bit of shooting. It is bad walking over the hillsides, rendered slippery by the bamboo leaves with which they are covered, and if one tries to save a fall, one is as likely as not to plant one's foot upon a prickly shrub or a nest of red ants. This is not very agreeable, and to make matters worse, the red monkeys which we try to shoot,

though well in sight, keep quite out of shot, and it is not until they hear the hoarse roar of a stag that they make clean off. As we advance, we detect traces of a tiger in the high grass, but night is falling, and we deem it more prudent to return.

*February 10th.*

Our men do not seem any the worse for their junketing of the previous day, being, if anything, more alert than ever, and we encounter just as many rapids and pass through the same scenery, though the hills seem more distant, with higher peaks in the background. It is better walking along the bank of the river, and we kill birds with very brilliant plumage, the multi-coloured *æthyopiga* with such metallic tints, which are the fly-catchers of this country. Our boys do not concern themselves much with these collections, and Thou, who cannot understand what interest there is in birds and insects, is only concerned to know whether there is a tiger about.

My attention was drawn, near a village on the right bank, to a slab surrounded by a small railing and surmounted by an iron cross with the following inscription :—

NICOLE
PUBLICISTE
DÉCÉDÉ EN 1888
LA MISSION PAVIE
RECONNAISSANTE

I uncover before the grave of one of those many Frenchmen, nearly all unknown, who have without

seeking either glory or reward, carried the flag of France into distant regions. This man, at least, has the consolation of resting upon French soil.

We are getting near to a post-house, and we meet a canoe which has come down from Van Bou, with a sergeant and a few linhs, to fetch a convoy of piastres at Van Yen. The sergeant, who has been in Tonkin three months, tells us that, in the course of the first night he passed at Van Bou four tigers entered the post-house and devoured a goat and several pigs.

*February* 11*th.*

The weather remains fine, and is not too hot for comfort, the light being soft and not trying to the eyes. The trees seem to melt away at their tops into the azure of the sky, and there is something very soft and soothing to the gaze in the air. It is so different from those African regions, where, side by side with a dazzling sun, are sharp contrasts of deep shadow. Here the sun is very treacherous, for, despite its mitigated light, it is more to be feared than that of Africa, and we are obliged to wear a sun-helmet, while many of our men, accustomed to the kepi in Algeria, have learnt to their cost that so light a head-covering will not do in Tonkin.

While we are at breakfast, the awning of a canoe held up by two poles serves as a shelter, and we choose as a halting place a sandbank as near as possible to a wood so as to have a chance of getting a few shots.

We have a guest to breakfast to-day, or rather a spectator, for he does not condescend to move

when he sees us. He is a small old man with a black, wrinkled skin, whom I take at first for a sorcerer. My blunder is all the more excusable because he wears a bracelet made of beads round the ankles, and is crouched over a heap of burning weeds which emit a dense smoke. The boatmen explain to me that he is merely making charcoal. After breakfast a five hours' march over a very hilly road brings us to a small village on the right bank which, we are told, is the Chinese Van Bou. Although very hilly the route is a good one, the brush having been completely cleared away, and the obstacles either removed or the road traced around them, so that in many places two horses can go abreast. It is a long time since we have come upon such a good road, and we feel sure that a Frenchman has had his hand in the work. Surely enough, about half an hour beyond the village, the route which had been running through the wood about 150 feet above the river, plunges into a forest of reeds, crosses the narrow valley, and then descends once more to the bank which is opposite to the post-house, where, after a short march, we arrive and are cordially received by Colonel Pennequin, who is in command of the fort.

# CHAPTER V.

**Van Bou—Inhabitants of the District—Thaïs, Mans, Meos—A Visit to the Meos—Excursions to the Molou Goldfields—Departure from Van Bou—On the Black River—Arrival at Laïchau—Deo Van Tri; his Origin, his Life, his Family—Excursions to the Plateau of Tafine (and the Sas, the Yaos and the Yans)—Meeting at Laïchau with MM. Massie and Gassouin—Relations with Deo Van Tri—Information about the Country—Our Departure.**

AFTER having spent several years in Tonkin, after having been in Guiana, Senegal, and Madagascar, Colonel Pennequin was last year placed in command of the military territory which corresponds more or less closely to the Black River. We soon find that he is a very able administrator, and the results which he has arrived at are truly surprising, for, all the way up the river and even beyond the frontiers of the Laos, we come upon traces of his handiwork, and we are constantly learning from the native chiefs themselves to appreciate him at his true value.

It is a piece of great good fortune for us to have encountered him, as his perfect knowledge of the country and of its inhabitants will greatly facilitate our journey, and I am all the more desirous of putting upon record how much I owe him, seeing that during our stay here I was indebted to him for

his hospitality as well as for his readiness to give us information.

Formerly situated two days' march from the river, at Son La, upon the right bank, in the midst of a more elevated and more healthy plain, the post-house has recently been moved to a more central position and one giving greater facilities of communication. The buildings, which are of mud, with the walls whitewashed and a thatched roof, are far enough apart from one another for the inhabitants to be perfectly at home, and they comprise residences and mess rooms for the colonel, the officers, the non-commissioned officers, and the post and telegraph clerks, while there are also storehouses, and a photographic studio. The families of the sharpshooters reside in the Muongs huts built upon piles, and the gates of the bamboo palisade are closed at night, covered balconies (*miradors*) enabling the sentinels to keep watch over the outskirts.

The settlement is as yet only a provisional one, for brick-kilns and lime-kilns have just been started, and the present buildings will soon be replaced by brick houses much higher and more spacious. There are two good kitchen gardens for supplying the garrison with fresh vegetables, while several coffee plantations have been made, and 300 eucalyptus trees are already above ground.

Outside the post-house a native village has sprung up, and Van Bou is probably destined to become a very important centre, the colonel, in order to attract settlers, having exempted the Annamites from forced labour and from the capitation tax, while several

come in from Montgzé and Manhao, without passing through Laokay, and they bring opium, which they sell for a quarter the price it costs in the Delta, as the monopoly does not extend beyond Cho-Bo.

There are a great many mines in the country, and the goldfields, one or more of which we hope to visit, are celebrated, though at present they yield little, as, since the war and the incursion of the Black Flags the Chinese workmen have left the country, and have not yet returned, while the native races do but little in the way of mining.

As regards population, the country may be divided into three zones, limited according to the altitude: below being the Thaïs; half way up the hills the Mans, and at the summit the Meos,—each of these three races having the most profound contempt for the other.

Brothers of the people of the Laos and of Siam, the Thaïs (free men, or labourers of the mountain, Pou-Thaï) are to be traced under the names of Thou, Thou-jen, Pan, Paï, Shan, Lao, &c., disseminated over a vast extent of territory, the approximate limits of which would be Setchouen to the north, the Quantoung to the east, the Irrawaddy to the west, and Cambodia and the Gulf of Siam to the south. Coming originally, no doubt, from the north many centuries ago as invaders, and representing the *débris* of some ancient empire, they have more than one point in common with the Thibet races and with the tribes which people the banks of the Upper Mekong above the Yunnam. They have an alphabet of their own, and, like the Thibetans, they write from left to right, while I find many points of resemblance

between their legends and the tales of the Thibetans, the hare, for instance, being made by each to personify cunning, as the fox does in our own fables.

There are white as well as black Thaïs on the Black River, the former inhabiting mostly the upper region from Van Bou to the frontiers of China, while the latter are to be met with chiefly lower down. There are but slight differences in the dress, the *patois* and the writing, and though our interpreter asserts that he cannot read the manuscripts of the black Thaïs, he is so lazy that I do not know whether to believe him or not.

The Thaïs have in some instances intermarried with the native races, and, apart from ethnographical characteristics, this facility of assimilation distinguishes them very clearly from the Annamites, who are much prouder and less easy to mould; for Annamite colonies founded sixty years ago upon the Mekong have not borrowed anything from their neighbours of the Laos, but have always remained the same, whereas the Chinese, on the contrary, who are settled in Tonkin adapt themselves to the contact of the dominating race.

The Thaïs are under a mild system of rule, which includes three administrative unities, commencing by *som* (hamlet) and going up to the *sa* (village) and to the *chau* (canton).

Every year, the assembly of notables in the hamlet allots the land suitable for cultivation among the inhabitants, so much to each one, according to the means of which he can dispose, the number of hands he can utilize, and the number of buffaloes which he owns. If any dispute arises, it is referred

to three magistrates selected for the purpose, but once the distribution of the lands has been effected, the produce is not divided, each person being left free to enjoy the fruits of his labour. The chiefs have more important lots given them, and they employ a part of the population; while if they are rather hard upon their workmen, on the other hand they possess granaries, store up provisions and feed the husbandmen, who, having sold their harvest too soon, find themselves without any means of subsistence. This system has the advantage of equalizing fortunes; it rarely produces individual wealth, but it prevents great distress. There is no clearly-defined religion among the Thaïs of this region; further north we shall meet with Buddhist tendencies imported from China or Burmah; but here there is nothing formal, neither divinities, pagodas, books nor priests. Upon the one hand, there is the worship of ancestors, on the other a belief in spirits, which personify the forces of nature, disease, or, in a word, the unknown origins of tangible phenomena. Is not this usually the case in all primitive religions? Whatever quarter of the globe we may visit, shall we not see the supernatural arising from the unknown and blending with it? The spirits are combated or invoked by little sticks of perfume and offerings, by small altars raised upon four posts and covered with red paper, by ornaments upon the houses, triangles or squares in bamboo, and by recourse to sorcerers. The latter exert great influence; there are frequently two in the same place, one representing the principle of good, the other that of evil. In this case they must avoid meeting each other; and if, in spite of all precautions, they find themselves face to

face, they must fight; if the struggle ends without bloodshed it is considered a bad omen. Sometimes they are both invited to the same ceremony; one then remains outside while the other is in the house, and *vice versâ*.

The dead are usually burnt upon a funeral pile, the place being afterwards marked by a small wooden altar; the ashes are inclosed in a vase and buried in some distant spot, which is reached by an indirect footpath.

As we continue our journey amongst the Thaïs, we shall constantly have occasion to allude to their dwellings, their resources, and their manner of living.

With regard to the *Mans* I have seldom met them; the localities they inhabit are often at some distance from each other, and they are not numerous between the Red and the Black Rivers. In type they approach the Maïs, and their costume, particularly that of the women, clearly distinguishes them from the other races. Are they of Thibetan origin, as some authorities have said? The problem is not yet solved; but they appear, like other races, to have come from the table-lands of the north.

Perhaps the invasion of the Meos was more recent. The Miao-tye, as they are called in Chinese, with their brothers the Yaos and the Lolos, still occupy the heights of Yunnan, Setchuen, and even of Quangsi as far as Quantoung, which, according to some authors, is the cradle of their race. They are mountaineers, tall, elegantly formed, with a firm gait, easily recognized from a distance; their faces are open, fair, and energetic; their character is gay. Usually of a peaceful disposition, they have, in

China, been driven back to the mountains by the conquerors of the soil; but they avenge themselves by making incursions into the valleys, from whence they vainly attempt to expel their spoilers. The Chinese treat them as *barbarians*, a generic name, by which they also designate all those who do not belong to the honoured race of *pig-tail wearers*. In Northern Tonkin the Meos are tranquilly living on good terms with the other populations, avoiding as much as possible all foreign contact; they rarely descend into the plains for the purpose of commerce or barter; they are self-supporting, and they assert that the lower air is pestiferous and fatal to them. Divided into several tribes according to the colour of their clothes, they pay a small tax to the chiefs of the canton, through the medium of their own chieftains. It will enable the reader to know them more thoroughly if he will follow us to a Meo village, situated at the back of Van Bou.

Lieutenant Didelot agrees to act as our guide in this excursion, which is made (including the journeys there and back) in one day; but the ascent is steep and fatiguing; the sides of the hills are cleared to a certain height for the cultivation of the giuey mountain rice, which does not require irrigation or any particular care; the ashes of the burnt wood serve as manure for the land, but in any case the inhabitants never sow the rice twice in succession on the same spot.

We soon enter the clouds, to pass out again almost immediately, and at our feet we behold only a white sea, extending far beyond our sight in every direction, with a few bare peaks emerging from it; one last ascent over the red earth and we reach our destination. The pass where we have stopped is 3,400 feet




MEOS OF VAN BOU. CHIEF AND WOMEN IN FULL DRESS.

above the sea, the higher peaks 5,400 feet. I find some bamboos growing even here, by the side of coniferous trees, something like our firs.

On both sides of the defile a few wooden houses built upon the ground and covered with thatch shelter the Meo families. The village contains about eighty inhabitants, although the people will only confess to numbering twenty-five, being afraid that we have come to verify the taxes.

When we arrive every one comes out to meet us. At first glance, the race seems handsome and strong, particularly to any one coming from the delta of Tonkin; the men are generally tall with fair and open faces, the eyes are oblique, the mouth small, the teeth white, the chin well formed and strong; their mien is confident. As they plant each footstep they seem to pause a moment to tread upon it more firmly, in which one recognizes a people used to mountaineering. The women are small and pleasing, their lips half open in a perpetual smile, which displays a row of beautiful white teeth; the nose is almost straight, the chin delicate, the lower part of the face perfectly regular; the eyes are just narrow enough to indicate that they belong to Oriental faces. Attractive and lively, they are distinctly different from the other races, and form an agreeable change to eyes accustomed to the Annamites and Thaïs of the plains.

By their costumes as well as by their type and customs the Meos remind me of the Lolos that I met at Setchuen; the men have the same fashion of dressing the hair in front, which causes them to be surnamed *Unicorns* by the missionaries. Here they wear a black turban round the hair; they have

the same small loose deep-blue vest, the same wide trousers. The women wear the same full pleated skirt which is so characteristic, and which I have never seen anywhere else; the bodice, crossed in front, fastened by a sash and worn with a large sailor collar at the back, is also found in the mountains which border on Yunnan-Fou. The men are bare-legged, but on special occasions the women wrap dark blue bands round their legs; the chiefs, for full dress, wear Turkish slippers, ordinary trousers, a small apron of many colours, a narrow sash passed several times round the waist, its fringed ends hanging down on one side, and on the chest a square of embroidered stuff, more striking and varied than those worn by the Thaïs. This costume is very picturesque, the predominant colours being white and deep blue. The Meos use a very ingenious method for obtaining the most varied designs without embroidery. For instance, upon a white material they trace the desired pattern in wax by means of a small copper instrument; thus coated, the stuff is plunged into a bath of dye, and when coloured it is placed in hot water, which dissolves the wax and uncovers the tracing. Few jewels are worn except ear-rings by the women, and by the men a silver circlet round the neck to which great value is attached. We cannot buy any of them, for the people tell us that if they part from them death will soon follow. They welcome us most kindly, as they know the officers, and the population is not distrustful, allowing us to visit everything quite freely, and answering all our questions.

The interior of the huts is rather dirty; woven mats placed upon four posts serve for beds. In one corner

a large copper dish from Lao Kay is used for preparing the pigs' food. These animals are numerous here, and are of quite a different breed from those of Tonkin. Bunches of maize and millet hang from the ceiling. I also notice some rice, and in some tubs are grains of maize and a plant known as "Job's tears," from which they make a bad brandy. The Meos use a very simple loom for weaving the flax they cultivate. They make paper from rice straw, and work iron with a primitive forge, made of the hollow trunk of a tree closed with cement, while two skins moved by a piston replace the bellows. Near the house, granaries for the maize are raised upon four posts to secure them from animals; tobacco leaves are drying upon cords; the gardens are well kept and surrounded with small palings. They contain some fruit trees—including the peach and tangerine.

They are more industrious than the Muongs, and make pails of hooped wood, which are carried by a kind of hook placed upon an extension of one of the pieces; they also have trowels, spades, and hoes.

The maize is ground in a mill formed of three stones, the centre one being pierced through its axis by a hole, through which the grain passes, and it turns by means of a wooden eccentric, which merely requires pushing or pulling.

For weapons they have guns with still shorter buts and longer barrels than those carried by the Thaïs; they also use bows with triggers, a kind of cross-bow. They show me how snares are spread for large animals by means of two bows laid horizontally

other. A string stretched across the animal's path puts the whole system in motion; the arrows are short, and the iron point is coated to its base with a resin which, they tell us, is a strong poison.

The men hunt, smoke, and drink, leaving the household work to the women, who, however, do not look very miserable. They carry their burdens in dossers made of plaited bamboos, and slung over their shoulders by means of braces. The Kas, who also use dossers, take the nape of the neck as their lever by employing a head-band secured round the forehead. The Meos are extraordinary pedestrians, and trot about the mountain like goats; but their customs must not be interfered with. If any one wishes for the services of a convoy of coolies, the burdens must be so divided that they can be placed in the dossers; they do not know how to carry anything between two porters by means of a bamboo.

They do not seem far advanced from an intellectual point of view. Their traditions date back only sixty years, when, driven away by famine, they left the mountains of Yunnan. They claim to be divided into white Meos and black Meos; and this grouping resembles the analogous distinction of the Lolos of Setchuen (white bones and black bones).

Their dialect, of which an officer, M. Talboux, has kindly given me a vocabulary,[1] seems to differ very little from that of the Meos of Traninh, of which I picked up a few words; but I do not find any connection between their language and those of the Yaos, Lolos, and Mios-Tzé, which different travellers

[1] See the Appendix.

have brought back to us. Before giving an opinion, we ought to have more abundant information on the subject.

They tell us that they have no writing, and they appear to worship ancestors or spirits. A small square of gilded paper at the back of the houses, a few small sticks of perfume, one or two eggs, some cut paper—this is all that forms and decorates the altar. At the entrance a suspended keg, upholding an outstretched skin, and a tambourine are used in honour of the dead. The arts are greatly neglected; they have a kind of guitar and a reed, to the sounds of which they dance, and the fact that they have dances is interesting, for in that respect they are distinct from the Chinese, who have none, and from the Thaïs, who only dance at certain religious ceremonials. I remark some drawings which have been made on a board; they are very primitive, and resemble in appearance those that may be found in Oceania, in the heart of Africa, or upon the carved bones of prehistoric ages.

We have a good look round, and the inhabitants, who do not interfere with us, are most obliging, letting us examine their houses, sitting for photographs full face and in profile, and putting on their grand costumes. As we come down, we halt at an altitude of about 2,200 feet near a spring, at a sanitorium which Colonel Pennequin is establishing for the use of invalids or of men requiring a rest; here it is always five degrees cooler than at Van Bou. Three or four bamboo huts have been erected in a few hours; a small garden with some radishes, cabbages, and four stems of wild vine at present form the

whole establishment, which is under the direction of Lieutenant Talboux.

While we halt, a messenger arrives bringing an order from the colonel that every one is to descend to Van Bou immediately. Twenty minutes at the outside suffice for the mobilization, the huts are pulled down, the bamboos utilized as supports and as thongs; everything is packed. The sharp-shooters do not forget their rice, above all, their opium lamps. Only a pig is left, that half lives in the thicket, and that until now has acted as scavenger, a part that his conquerors have the habit of playing under the Muong houses. We soon reach the bottom, when we find that Colonel Pennequin has just heard of the destruction of the outpost of Yen Lang, which took place a week ago. Captain Pouligou and several men are killed, forty-five guns and twenty-five thousand cartridges are taken, and the Doc Ngu is triumphant, so there is no time to lose. A reinforcement of one hundred and fifty men will be sent to Van-Yen to protect the valley of Phou-Yen against a sudden attack. We lend our pirogues for this purpose, and intend taking advantage of the delay by visiting the mines situated on the right bank of the river.

On the morrow the colonel gives us some details as to the disaster of Yen Lang. The pirates entered in the evening disguised as coolie porters; one of them, wearing a helmet, preceded the party on horse-back, and thanks to this disguise he was able to deceive the sentinel. The gate taken, the remainder of the men hidden in the wood were called up. The surprise had succeeded, but it required a great deal

of courage for the attempt, and without the complicity of the inhabitants of the country it must certainly have failed; unfortunately, the outpost had not received any information, though for some weeks past the unfortunate captain had complained of the difficulties which he encountered in ascertaining the least movement of the enemy. The nominal chief of the pirates is an old doc (general), the Doc Keou, who is sixty years of age; but the real chief is his lieutenant, the Doc Ngu, formerly called *dedoc* in Annam; like his fellow countrymen, he pretends that he is fighting for the Emperor of Annam (Hamghi). Until now he has always been victorious, and he is abundantly supplied with arms and ammunition. The natives fear and obey him, besides they have not much to complain of, as he taxes them very little. His strength, as we have said before, is partly due to us, and his thorough acquaintance with several provinces gives him great freedom of action.[1] Let us hope that the Government will at length realize its mistakes and listen to the advice of those who for many years have travelled in these districts. The evening of the 15th is marked by a frightful tempest which lasts all through the night, and shakes every building in the post; luckily the houses are low and the wind has little effect.

On the morning of the 16th we cross the river in a ferry boat hollowed out of the trunk of a tree, in

[1] A few months ago Doc Ngu's band was destroyed by Colonel Pennequin, and the Doc Ngu himself has been beheaded by some other Muong chiefs, who have thus rewarded us for having granted them, thanks to the intervention of M. Vacle, autonomy in their

which two horses can stand; the weather is dull; the thermometer registers 77 F. in the day. We are on horseback as well as the interpreter Cho-Ken; four Muong sharp-shooters accompany us and serve as our guides; our troop is augmented by a dozen coolies and by our boys.

After repassing the Chinese Van Bou, where I admire the thick groves of enormous tangerine trees, we leave the river bank to ascend the valley of one of its affluents, the Nam-Bou. This is only a torrent of muddy water, which runs by the side of a good road; at times the rock encroaches upon the pathway and we walk upon mats of crossed bamboo, supported by piles.

The halting places for the coolies are marked by shelters, a thatched roof upon four posts. Near one of them, whilst luncheon is being prepared, I find in the wood a human skull, a skeleton, a blanket belonging to the administration and a cangue. What are these remains, and what tragedy has been played here? The bones are mute; we may suppose that an escaped prisoner has reached here to die of hunger or disease, or to fall a prey to the wild beasts.

As we advance the woods increase in size; fig-trees with ribbed trunks always predominate. Palm-trees rear their long and elegant stems from the ground; they attain the height of fifteen or twenty feet. The ferns are superb, but they are not arborescent. We are on a slatey soil, and in certain places the passers-by have erected some large slabs.

We gradually ascend as we pass from one basin to the other, while bamboos and reeds replace the large trees. The country has few inhabitants;

there are merely some scattered huts for the rice planters.

We do not enter a more populated district until the evening, when we reach the village of Muong Chum. The chief's house, where we pass the night, is recognizable from a distance by the ornaments formed like stags' antlers, which are placed at the two extremities of the roof; it is a distinctive sign which we shall meet with elsewhere. The dwelling is clean. We have not, as in China, the discomfort of being surrounded by a curious and annoying crowd, for the natives are discreet. Our men work well and each one attends to his own business, the horses are unsaddled, and while Baptiste gets our meal ready, Thou attends to the arrangements for the night, and to the luggage, and Sao prepares the birds that have been killed during the day. Thou is a good walker, but finding himself rich for the moment through some successful gambling with the sharp-shooters in Van Bou, he manifests the intention of buying a horse. I advise him, while he is about it, to also take a boy into his service, but he does not put his idea into practice, and on the following morning he again starts on foot.

We are awakened at dawn by the monotonous noise made by women husking the rice underneath the house; with the foot they move a long wooden lever, terminated by a kind of hammer, which regularly falls into the receiver. Some of them are occupied in this way all the day long, but they work in relays.

On the road we first pass through a sparsely inhabited country, which recalls Caophong, with its

pastures covering the chalky hillocks, then we enter the woods; now penetrating the virgin forest with its giant trees bound together by the inextricable network of tropical creepers; now crossing a thinly sown plantation of young oaks, amongst which I notice some hazel bushes.

At Bau-Nahoum, where we lunch, I remark several fishermen's huts. Each hut has a small garden planted with vegetables in the front, and the land seems very good everywhere. What fine unoccupied spaces these would be for attempting cultivation on a large scale, when the country had been pacified and the communications with the Delta facilitated! Cotton grows here without any attention, and when planted upon the heights or upon land cleared by burning the annual arbuscles, it attains a height of nearly five feet; it is sown in the spring and harvested in the autumn, and it fetches three piastres the picul gross weight.[1] Each house, according to its importance, should produce from seventy to one hundred pounds yearly, but the natives here content themselves with growing merely sufficient for their own requirements. Maize and rice are also cultivated; wild fruits furnish an oil, and a brown dye is obtained from a tubercle frequently found on a level with the earth and analogous to the truffle; this is the false *gambir*, called cunao in Annamite. In Annam it is the object of an important trade, and it is sold even upon the market of Hong Kong. Cattle feed well upon the pastures, pigs and buffaloes are also reared. The latter wear wooden bells, made of a piece of bamboo with two external clappers.

[1] One hundred and thirty-three pounds.

From Bau-Nahoum until the evening we notice little variation in the landscape. It consists of grassy undulations with a few small oaks, and here and there hillocks of earth from six to nine feet high, excrescences on the land like gigantic mole-hills; these are constructed by the termites.

We now approach the Deloustal mine; a fine view includes the distant mountains of Thanoa, and we pause to admire the prospect and at the same time to glance at the copper bed.

A few holes have been made in a porphyric rock under the direction of a lawyer from Hanoï, who took the perimeter, but he did not try deeper than sixteen to twenty feet. In the water I notice some sulphate of copper of a beautiful green which pulverises and crumbles under the finger; the vein is surmounted by a layer of oxide of iron, which is called the cap of the vein; it is found between the primitive strata and the calcareous formations. Analogous characteristics are found in the metallic beds of Nevada. However, the Frenchmen who have been here have not yet considered the vein worth the expense which would be incurred in establishing and carrying on the necessary works and transports, so at present the mine seems abandoned.

We re-descend to a plain cultivated in rice fields, in the midst of which chalky eminences in the form of cylinders rise from the ground surrounded at their base by a hedge of large trees. Nam-Xoung, where we shall pass the night, is a large village containing some twenty houses.

We are warmly greeted as usual; the chief comes to meet us and installs us in a small compartment

at the extremity of his house. Here we are allowed to pass to and fro and to stay and chat in the public room, which we consider most interesting. The men and women are squatted round two fire-places ; the latter are generally ugly, and here, as in Thibet, their features are less delicate, their faces fuller and rounder than the men's. The young girls wear their hair in a chignon behind the head, the married women wear it on the top. Many of them have a silver ring inserted in the lobe of the ear, to which they suspend a second ornament. They are now occupied in lacquering their teeth. A piece of wood is held above the fire ; when it is covered with smoke-black it is scraped with a spatula and the powder is used. A young man is playing a very soft melody. His instrument is a small rectangular sheet of copper in which a key is cut ; silk cords are attached to the two extremities, and the sounds are obtained by the vibration of the metal against the teeth. This instrument requires much practice before it can be skilfully used.

I am able to make several purchases here, including some costumes and two manuscripts (black Thaï) ; they are collections of songs which are usually difficult to obtain. A monkey is brought for us to buy, but the species is common. The natives say that game is plentiful in the neighbourhood, so we keep watch for it as we travel, but the tigers do not show themselves, though, at last, they make themselves heard, for we are awakened in the middle of the night by a frightful hubbub produced by the animals fastened beneath the house. Every one gets up, the men go out and light huge fires, which they keep up until the

morning. A tiger has come within thirty yards of the village, and is close to us; we hear his short jerky breathing, the powerful rattle in his throat, from time to time interrupted by a loud snapping of his jaws; he approaches the house and at times seems near, so I load my rifle. A crack in the wall at the angle where I sleep serves as a loophole; but the moonlight is superb, and the animal, seeming to mistrust it, will not leave the thicket, but contents himself with keeping us awake until daybreak, when he slowly withdraws, roaring at intervals as he goes.

18*th February.*

In the afternoon the road is bad; at every cross turning the guide, who precedes us, indicates the right way by barring the others with branches that he breaks on purpose. After passing through some tall grass we reach a region of calcareous rocks, exactly resembling those of the Along Bay; and henceforth, in going round these cliffs, we are obliged to travel in continual zigzags. For some hours we follow the bed of a torrent, then we cross a small river, the Nam Pan, in which my horse falls awkwardly. Luckily I escape with only my saddle-bags wet through, for nothing is lost, and the sun will soon repair the misfortune. A little higher up this river issues from a mountain, after flowing beneath it for several furlongs. The district would be a curious study from a geological point of view; it has been moved, shaken, overthrown, and looks as if a formidable disturbance had taken place. Everywhere we see chaos, rubbles, holes and caverns; to the latter I owe the

loss of a magnificent civet cat, which I shot in a tree, and which we see instantly fall and disappear in the earth, without any possibility of recovery. We stop at Molou, the goal of our excursion. Imagine a circus, five to six hundred yards in diameter, inclosed by high gray walls, which, in places, are scarcely hidden by the brushwood clinging to their sides; at the bottom of the basin rice fields surround the houses of the village, which are of Muong construction placed upon piles, although they are partly inhabited by Chinese. A kind of inn, inferior, dirty, smelling of opium, recalling the komkoing of the Celestial Empire, is reserved for travellers; but in spite of our interpreter's preference for hotels established by his fellow countrymen, we prefer another lodging. The four militiamen who accompany us understand our thoughts; the caï (corporal), a quick, active, clear-headed man, who speaks a few words of French, quickly complies with our unspoken wishes, and leads us to the dwelling of the chief, where we meet with the same hospitality to which we are now accustomed.

It is still daylight, and I do not wish to lose any time before visiting the gold workings, so while our men are installing themselves, I express to the contractor my wish to see the works. He replies that, unfortunately, we have arrived at an unlucky moment, for orders have been received from the chief town of the district that there are to be three days of public prayer to drive away a disease which rages amongst the cattle, and this command implies the cessation of all work. The chief is much embarrassed; he fears that he shall displease us, yet he is equally anxious not to irritate his superiors, from whom a messenger

has recently arrived. For our own part we are greatly annoyed. Shall we, after coming three days' march to examine the works at Molou, be obliged to leave without seeing anything, or to wait three days longer, while the gods are being propitiated? At last, with a little good-will on both sides, everything is amicably arranged. We are to pay the work-people for anything they do for us, and they will give us the proceeds of their labour, and thus they will only benefit indirectly from it; in this way they will not appear to break their compulsory rest.

About one hundred yards from the village four wells have been dug; they are nearly twenty yards deep and one square yard wide. Above each of them a small shelter carries a bamboo windlass, moved by a capstan, on which a leather strap is rolled. Two coolies work at each well; one descends to the bottom by opening his legs and hands and catching them in the notches made in the walls, the other remains at the opening. The galleries communicate, and the workmen use wooden lamps, lighted with oil of sesamum and a cotton mesh. The work is only carried on during the four winter months, for in summer the heat is too great. Each man fills about ten baskets a day (each basket holding from twenty to forty pounds). The land is clayey, of two colours, yellow or brown, according to the hole. And the most gold seems drawn from the second. I remark, by the side of round stones, some fragments of quartz, with quite fresh edges. The labourers tell us that the auriferous earth follows a certain line and winds like the bed of a river, so we wonder whether the bed has not been formed by the decomposition of the schists

eddying at the bottom of the basin of Molou. The baskets filled, the earth is carried a short distance to a box of planks about a yard square, set in the ground ; the bottom forms a gentle slope and a thin thread of water passing over the upper edge flows beneath the partition at the bottom; with a toothless rake a workman continually pushes back the earth that the water carries down ; gradually, first the large stones, then the coarser gravel, are separated from the fine sand and are carried away; then the rake is laid down, and the earth that remains upon the uneven plank is gently spread out ; the heavier nuggets are caught, picked up by the nail and placed upon a piece of banana leaf. Whatever the natives may say, a great deal must be lost by this system, and they are not acquainted with the use of mercury. They tell me that they have tried the sifters we have seen used in Thibet without finding any more gold than they do now ; but, from the thirty-two baskets full of clay that we saw washed at Molou, only fifty-two centigrammes of gold were obtained, that is, scarcely twenty-three grains troy to the ton.

The extraction of gold is now made for the benefit of two half-castes, Thaïs and Chinese. The Chinese here no longer work at the mines ; they cultivate the fields and occupy themselves with trade. The labourers employed are not paid but fed ; they form, in a way, part of their master's family. Their support (food and opium) may be valued at the outside at fourpence halfpenny a day. As the gold is found it is exchanged with the Chinese for various merchandise, opium first of all. The raw drug comes from Moug-



GOLD WASHINGS AT MOULOU, FEBRUARY 18TH, 1892.

eighteen piastres, at Laïchau thirty piastres, and here forty the hundred tens; the latter quantity is paid for by about one ten and a half of gold.

But the Chinese take advantage of the simplicity of the Muongs to, at first, provide them with a little more goods than they can pay for; they then make advances to them, at a fabulous rate of interest, so that the unfortunate natives are never able to pay off their debt, and necessarily the whole produce of their labour, until they die, goes to fill the coffers of some merchant of the Celestial Empire. And here I notice the same racial peculiarity that I have already seen in a great portion of Asia, in Turkestan, in Thibet, and in the Malay Peninsula. The Chinese, wherever they can insinuate themselves in the old continent, play the part of the Jews in Europe. Mahommedans, Turks, Thibetans, natives of the banks of Mekong, from Saïgon to Batang, are oppressed, deceived, exploited by the one as the Russian peasants were by the others. Everywhere the simple are crushed by the skilful; the earthen pot vainly struggles against the iron one. When will the meeting of the two brothers take place, the Semite of the West come in contact with the Semite of the East?

Will a collision follow? Will the wolves devour each other? The future alone can solve this question. Until now they have left each other a free field; one nation has turned to the right the other to the left. This is perhaps the best explanation of a phenomenon which has puzzled a great many ethnographers, the almost complete absence of the Jewish element from one-half of the ancient world. The half-breed con-

tractor, who gave us the information about the works, told me that his Chinese father had seven or eight hundred workmen of his fellow countrymen, and he earned a great deal; but some piracy occurring, he departed with his money without troubling himself about his wife and son. The speaker added that if he had any money he would increase his works and thus make a great fortune, but that the French ought to come here; they could engage Thaïs coolies for about three piastres per month (food and opium being provided), but that there was much more to do at Yetong, about four miles above Van Bou; the bed seemed richer and was completely abandoned.

*February* 19*th.*

Having seen some of the mining works in the morning, we leave Molou after our coolies, the road, which we follow, often leading us through woods, passing from hillock to hillock, from circus into circus, by continual ascents and descents; it is quite one of the worst that I have yet met with. It would be even dangerous at night, for the ground is pierced with holes, that are so numerous in certain places, that there is scarcely room to pass without falling into one of them. The openings are often half hidden by brambles or grass, and some of the wells, the remains of former gold workings, are from five to six yards deep; so travellers must be careful.

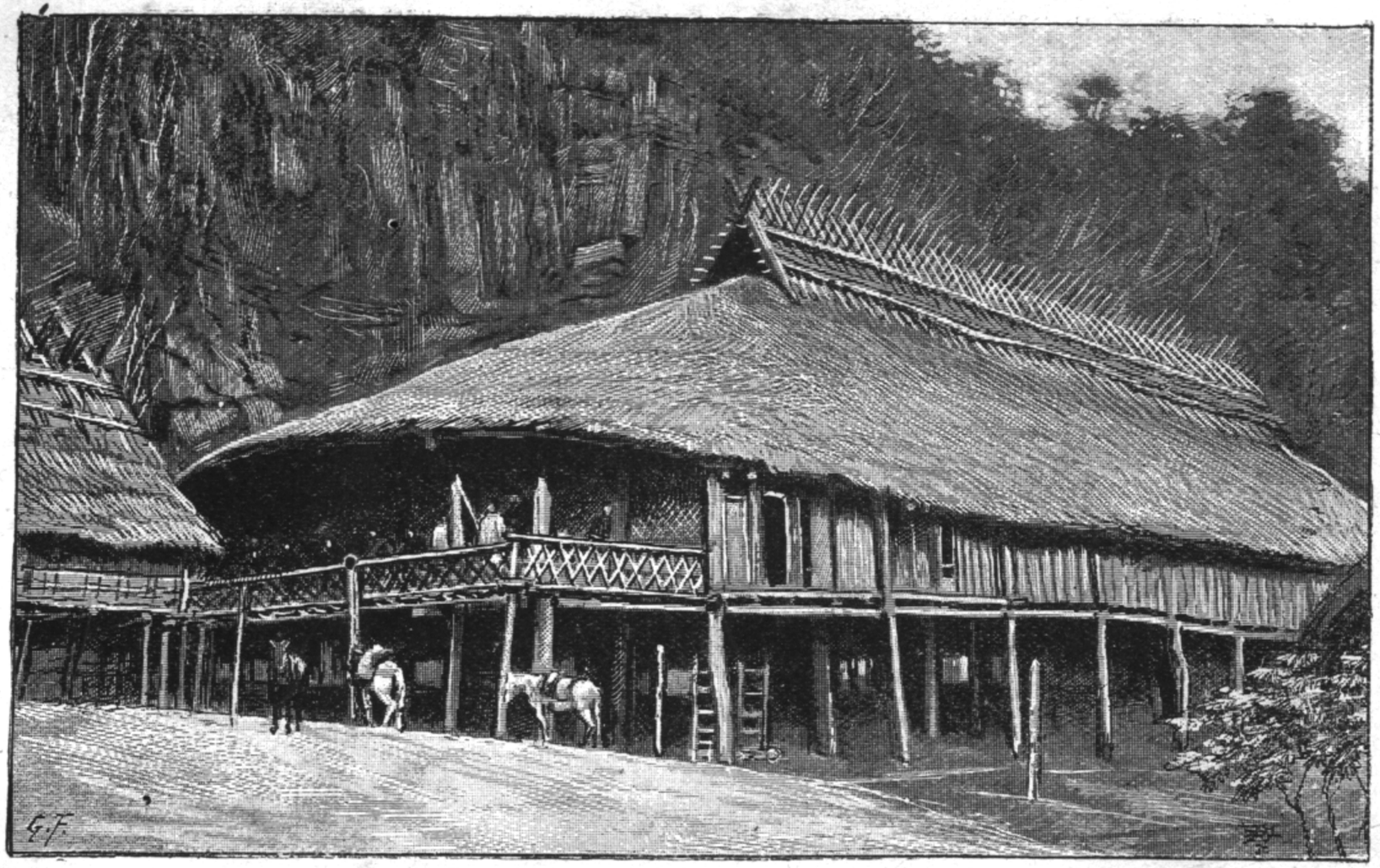
At the top of a small hill we see several men apparently commencing a new mine. An old man and his two sons are digging an excavation round the roots of some bamboos; but they tell us that they

are not looking for gold here. A burrow has been discovered, inhabited by a large species of rat, which sometimes weigh as much as twenty pounds; their flesh is excellent. A fire of brushwood lighted at the mouth of the burrow has smothered them, and now it is only necessary to dig deeply to uncover the bodies; but we have not time to witness the capture.

We lunch at the bottom of a basin at Bophien Noï. It is smaller and less circular than that of Molou; the two or three families that live here extract and wash the auriferous sand by the system already described. They tell us that after working for some time without any results, they only recommenced finding gold after the erection of a small pagoda; the spirits have rewarded them, and now they place pots containing sticks of perfume near the sand wells. The gold found here is like rather fine dust; there are no nuggets even the size of a grain of rice. Sao buys a little gold, asserting that it is an excellent remedy against disease.

During the remainder of the day the road continues quite as undulating as in the morning; it finally opens into a large valley, shut in on one side by a calcareous cliff more than 600 feet high. We stop at the foot of this wall, in the village of Ban-May. From here to Van Bou there are but two stages; the first is divided by luncheon and a short halt at Maïson. This is a large borough of seventeen houses, the capital of the province. The chief, a stout old man, wearing a silk jacket, like the Chinese, comes to meet us with some of the leading men, and invites us to rest at his house. His dwelling, which is very pretty and still new, was built last year, and

exactly resembles a Noah's Ark. You can judge from its dimensions: it is seventy yards long, thirty wide, and more than ten yards high with the roof. The walls are of straight boards pierced by small windows; there are even shutters. The woodwork of the roof is very curious; the opposite slopes are joined at the extremities by a kind of half cone, cut lengthways, supported by a series of bamboos arranged in horizontal and parallel curves. One smooth section entirely intersecting the roof would thus obviously produce the image of an ellipse; the leaves which cover it are laid over the exterior like the slates with us. The interior is very clean. A large partition of boards entirely separates one-third of the dwelling from the rest and this is reserved for strangers. In the portion occupied by the chief, lateral partitions form a kind of cabin, used by the women. One room, closed by a large green blind, contains the altar of the ancestors; a rack holds the rifles of the militiamen (there are thirty of them). At the side, are some large green parasols, the insignia of command, with the palanquin, which consists of a hammock, suspended by a bamboo, and protected from the sun by a canopy gilded and ornamented at each extremity. Our host seems rich; he even owns some European articles, a hanging lamp, an almanac, a table, some chairs, and a clock of which he appears very proud, for when we arrive he gets upon a chair to make it strike. We find ourselves the guests of a generous man, too generous even to please us. I dare not try to buy anything. A woman's costume, some animals' skins, some living birds (amongst others a very interesting partridge), whatever we wish for is at once offered



HOUSE OF THE CHIEF AT MAÏSON. FEBRUARY 20, 1892.

to us, and as a present. I have no other resource than to promise to send some remembrance from Van Bou; evidently the merest trifle will give pleasure. In fact, commerce is scarcely developed at all here; the Delta only sends up salt, which is sold for five piastres the picul (for silver), or seven piastres represented by the value in merchandise, and matches (from sevenpence halfpenny to tenpence for ten boxes; at Hanoï worth twopence).

In the evening we enter a superb plain, from one to two miles wide and twelve miles long, almost entirely cultivated as rice fields. The river winding through the middle, is dotted with fishing stations and bordered with bamboo wheels supporting bowls of six to eight yards in diameter, by which the water is raised for irrigation. The villages, consisting of five to fifteen houses, are very numerous, and lie about every two or three hundred yards on both sides of the valley. Ban-Co, where we slept, is situated opposite to Son-La, the site of the old post. The position, as I have already said, is healthier and pleasanter than that of Van Bou, but it is less central, particularly with regard to its communications. It takes a long day to go from the old post to the new one, and the return journey is difficult to accomplish in the same time. For about an hour and a half after leaving Ban-Co, we reach the edge of the plain and enter the woods, afterwards descending for the greater part of the day by a road that is now good but very fatiguing. On the way I notice some veins of superb pink marble. We halt at the village of Muong-Bou, and then regain the road already followed on our journey to Molou, in the valley of Nam-Pou.

Several of the smaller chiefs accompany us, amongst others the son of our host at Maïson. Colonel Pennequin took him to Hanoï two years ago, and he therefore thinks that he ought to make some concessions to European fashions, so he wears red leather buskins, has a gold watch, and carries a silver-headed cane in one hand. His face is energetic, he understands some words of French, and our presents of chromolithographs and Parisian stuffs meet with his approval; one portion of them is to be remitted to his father.

Nothing fresh has happened at Van Bou. The colonel has gone back to Hanoï; no one has heard of any fresh attacks from the pirates. Some pirogues have arrived from Laïchau so we can start again, and intend doing so after stopping one day.

In leaving Van. Bou, I cannot sufficiently express my thanks to Colonel Pennequin, the officers and non-commissioned officers, for their hearty welcome, for the information which they have given us, and for the facilities which they provided for our excursions and for the remainder of our voyage. On the eve of our departure the non-commissioned officers invited us to take wine with them and we joyously drank to each other's success, and above all to France! I was struck by the good humour, the gaiety, and the cordiality which reigned, and, at the same time, when it became a question of going into active service, with what enthusiasm each one claimed the honour of going, and what honour! Not always the chance of promotion or of winning a decoration, but of exposing one's self to a ball fired from behind, under shelter of a bush, the risk of illness and fever, of

falling unknown, without reward or glory. Unfortunately it has been impossible for me to go amongst our non-commissioned officers in barracks in France, but I have seen them at work far away, and wherever I have been in Tonkin I have found them steadfast, devoted, courageous, in a word, really fine men. I am anxious to make this statement as publicly as possible.

*February 23rd.*

Our new pirogues are smaller than those in which we came, but the boatmen are equally good. The country becomes wilder as we ascend the river, and we do not see any more villages. The stream is about one hundred yards wide and very winding; on the left it receives an affluent, the Nam-Mou. The banks are often formed of a small sandy beach bordered with reeds where the tracks of animals of every kind cross each other in great numbers—tigers (of which I see very large foot-marks), deer, peacocks, &c. We fire at a jungle cock, and from a distance, so that we are not able to hit them, at a band of large black gibbons. They were seated upon a rock motionless as statues, and at our shots they flee into the woods without a cry.

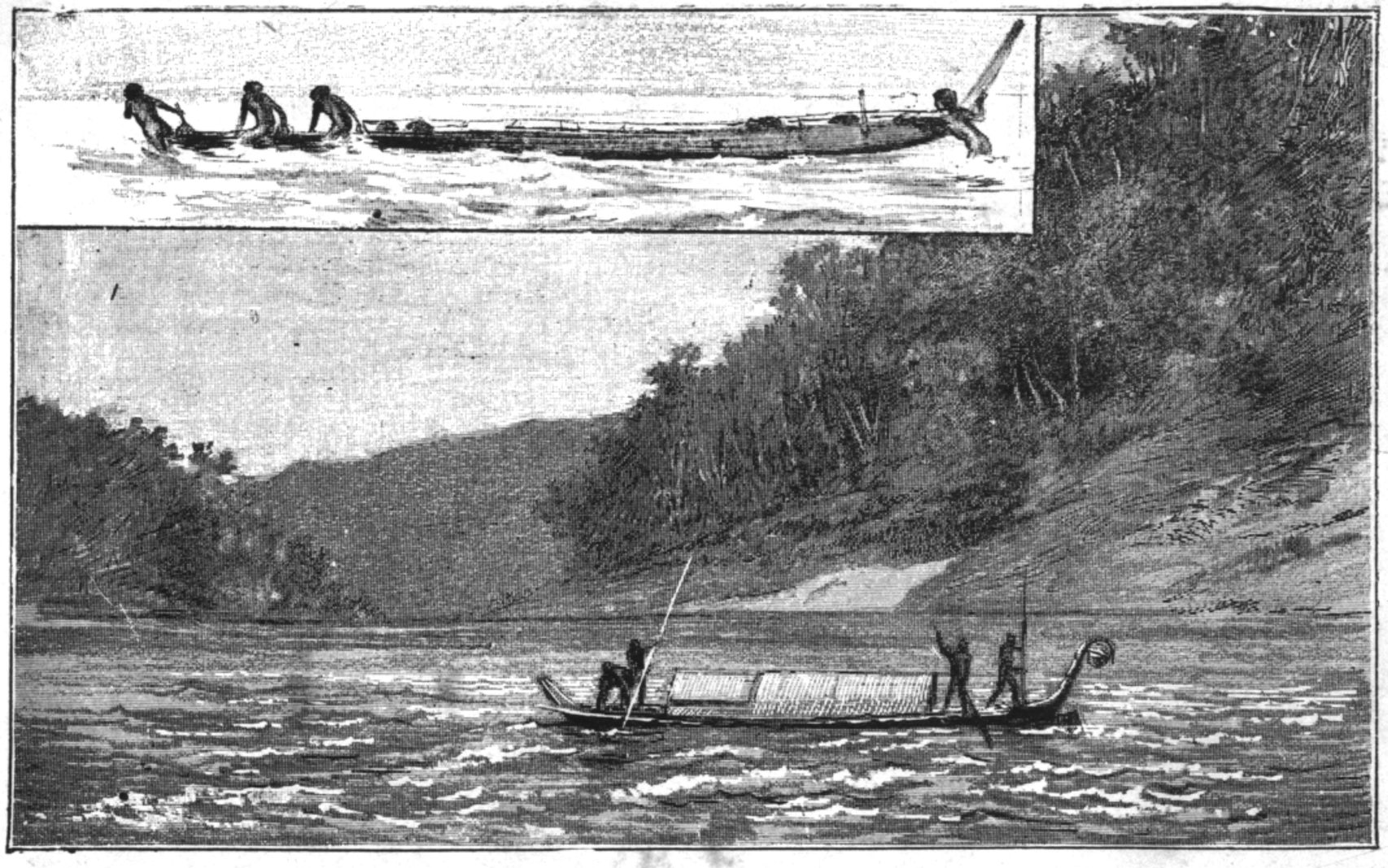
*February 24th.*

When we awake a whitish mist floats above the river, apparently gliding and moving upon the surface; the rising sun soon gilds it with its first rays, and it then resembles a large veil of gauze, put on through coquetry.

The harsh cries of the peacocks are heard as they answer each other from hill to hill, but they cannot be seen. Some native hunters have been more fortunate than ourselves, for we pass a pirogue with the skin of a young tiger, killed a few days ago, drying upon it.

To-day, as always, there are a great many rapids, but some of them are more dangerous than usual. One of them, Hat-Meo, is divided in two by a bank of shingles; we are puzzled how to approach it. After some discussion, the boatmen all get into the water intending to drag the pirogue round to the left, but the current is too strong and withstands their efforts it seizes the boat and carries it off; the men have only time to jump on board. We redescend the stream with great rapidity while the steersman vainly attempts to guide our course; there is nothing to be done, and I foresee the moment when we shall be dashed with tremendous force against a large rock; there is not a yard between us; the boat will break or at least fill with water. Take care! . . . A light shock, just sufficient to wake our lazy interpreter with a start, and that is all. With wonderful skill, one of the boatmen has managed to spring upon the rock, before the pirogue touches it, and supporting his back against the stone, he has broken the shock with his feet. A cord or rather two are at once unrolled, and every one sets to work and pulls. It is well that we have two cables, for one breaks instantly, but at last, after many efforts, we pass through this formidable rapid. We have advanced about eighty yards in an hour and a half.

Our men do not forage for their dinner; rice always



GOING UP A RAPID ON THE BLACK RIVER, FEBRUARY 21, 1892.

forms the principal ingredient of their meals. Two earthenware pots cemented one above the other serve as a saucepan; the bottom of the upper one is pierced with small holes, the water is placed in the lower one, and the steam as it escapes through the holes, cooks the rice. The men find a few seasonings in the woods; acidulated pods (tamarisk ?) and banana buds, which, they say, give an excellent flavour to fish.

Our boys themselves, although they have only played the part of spectators, appear to require some rest after the emotions of the day. Thou becomes communicative; he confesses to me that he has gained a great deal at Van Bou, but he will not play any more; and, in order to avoid temptation, he asks me to change the twenty piastres which he possesses for a note. I do not believe in his "drunkard's oath;" his favourite game is played with four sapèques. The players bet upon heads or tails; here it is black or white. "The Congaïs," admitted Thou, "are fond of gambling, and hold the winners in great esteem."

I take advantage of the young Annamite's confidential mood to ask him about his creed. "Yen a," he tells me, "Thou dead will become a small leaf at the top of a tree." And he looks with a melancholy expression at the foliage, which trembles in the wind. But this subject of conversation does not please him; he prefers talking about Luang Prabang and lovely women.

*February 25th.*

Always the same slow ascent, but it is not wearisome to those who will look about them. There are notes to enter, birds to prepare, photographs to take,

luncheon, shooting expeditions on land, while the boat is passing the rapids, a little fishing; amusements are not lacking and the weather is fine. We have minima of 59° F., and maxima of 86° F. in the shade during the afternoon and no annoyances, on condition that one is patient. Great tranquillity is compulsory; it is almost a contemplative life, and it has its advantages . . . . provided there is not too much of it. During the afternoon halts our boatmen cut down some branches, tie them together and throw them into the water, with stones to keep them at the bottom. They take them up when they leave and pick out the fresh-water prawns which have lodged in them, and which provide them with a good meal in the evening.

With regard to sport, we are not lucky. A few otters, which our men call *dogs that go in the water*, some monkeys, and a magnificent peacock are all missed; our unskilfulness has one excuse, for we shoot with rifles from a distance and as we move. Our men capture a water tortoise; the shell is flat and less hard than in the land species, the beak is pointed, the feet webbed for swimming. It is a young one, not more than twelve inches long, while some are found of more than a yard. Thou, who in his profession as traveller often acts as cicerone, calls it *tirte*, or *five-footed animal*; he tells us that the flesh is fatal to any one suffering from syphilis.

*February 26th.*

In the afternoon the hills are lower, and their summits are usually denuded of wood. We begin to meet some people, for we are now approaching a large

village, Quinaï,[1] the chief town of the province; some twenty houses are scattered amongst the trees, which include some superb palms. Upon the beach some men are keeping up a fire under the trunk of a hollow tree; a pirogue is being made of a single piece, and it is necessary to straighten the sides. There is an unusually large number of people, for the chief is marrying one of his sons and is giving a grand feast; men and women from all the country-side have been invited. The latter wear a small chemisette fastened by silver hooks of rather delicate work; a handkerchief with embroidered ends is arranged upon the head like those worn by the Breton women; flowers are stuck in one side of the hair. Some of the guests come from the neighbouring hills or from the villages opposite; they cross the river in long boats, which two men, one in front and one at the back, guide with paddles.

The people sell us some provisions and give us some information. A pirogue was shipwrecked five days ago a little above here. It was manned by some Chinese, who were bringing opium down to Van Yen; one of the passengers was drowned, but there is no reason for us to be alarmed for our boatmen are good, and we have confidence in them, we therefore leave without fear.

*February 27th.*

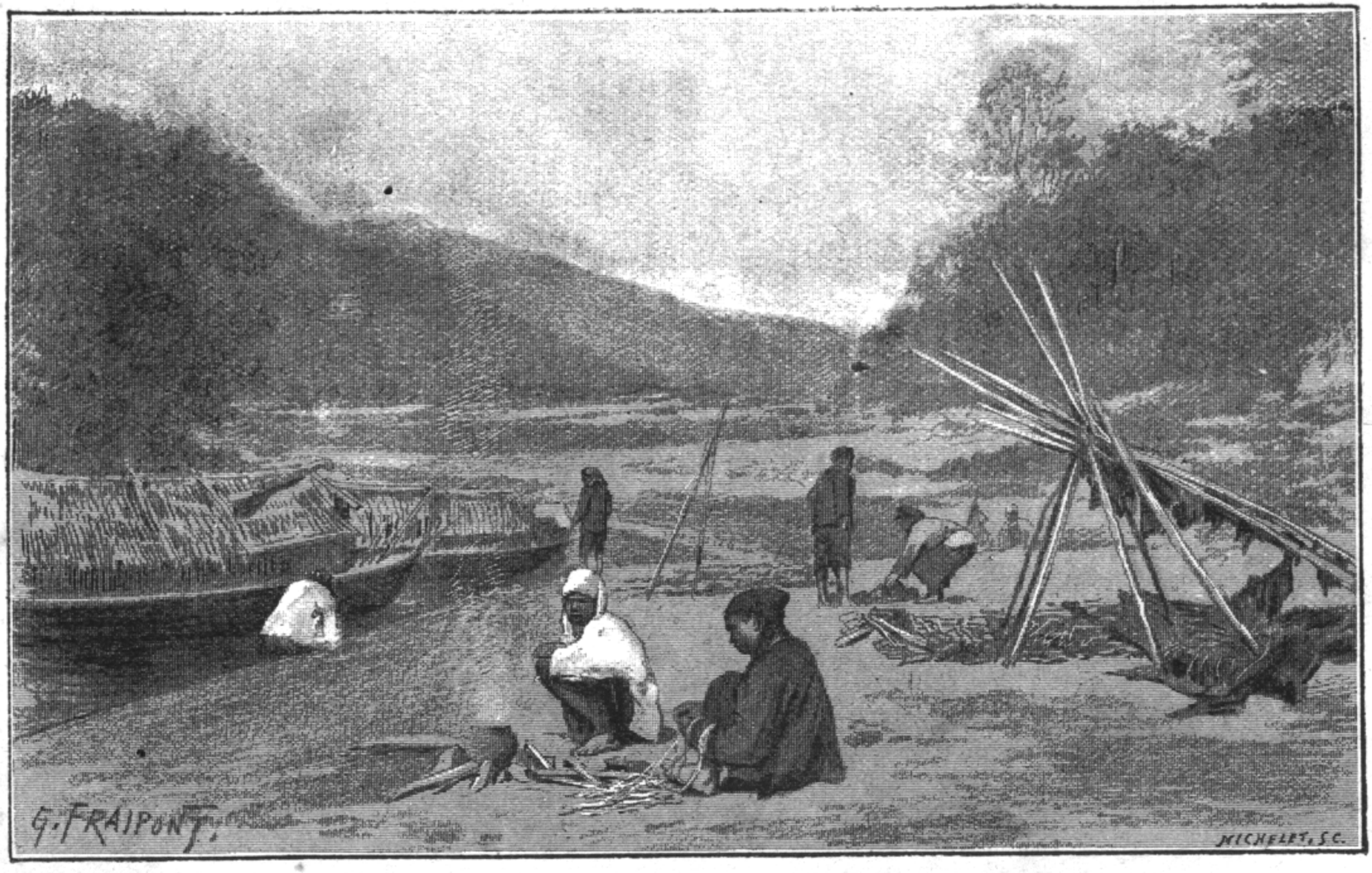
A few more villages in the morning and then we enter a well-wooded and less populated district where we pass several fishermen. One of them has built a shelter on the small sandy beach; it is made of bamboos

[1] The Annamite name given to the chau by a king of Tonkin. In the Thaïs language Quinaï is called Muong-Tien.

and banana leaves, and his pirogue is moored before it. He has two European flint guns, and his provisions are placed in small baskets of plaited bamboos. He fishes with cast-nets garnished with plates of lead and with bottom lines; the fishhooks are coarse and badly pointed.

Further on the banks draw closer together, and we enter a long defile with very high calcareous walls, similar to the one which we passed through before Van Yen; in the evening we camp upon a little sand bank. Some natives returning from Nam-Ma stop near us; they have been selling eggs, chickens, and ducks, but have only a goat left, which they offer us for four piastres, but we have no use for it.

It is too late to attempt any shooting. To the boys' astonishment I seat myself near the boatmen who at once make room for me on the side where I shall not feel the smoke from their fires To their usual bill of fare they have added the tender leaves of a small shrub called Pac-neu, which, they say, is both a good seasoning and an excellent remedy for pains in the stomach. Having ended their meal, they amuse themselves by organizing games. The preparations are very simple; the sand serves for a table, a rectangle is traced and divided into small squares. This is the camp; on the two sides circles are drawn representing the mountain; in the centre of them, in A and in B, a pin of curved bamboo represents a tiger; twenty-two small pins all round the rectangle are the pigs. Pigs and tigers have the right to move backwards or forwards, from one intersection to the other; the tigers can take one of their adversaries by jumping certain lines; the pigs




HALT ON THE BANKS OF THE BLACK RIVER, FEBRUARY 26, 1892.

cannot take, but they can drive back the tigers by occupying the positions in front of the circle; but I always saw the latter lose.

In another game two men place themselves face to face; each raises one hand and suddenly lowers it, at the same time closing it except one finger. It is a puzzle game, each player trying to guess which fingers the other has closed. The victory is won according to certain rules, which depend upon the meeting of the thumb and forefinger or of one of the two with the little finger. The remainder of the party form a circle round the players; they discuss and criticise the strokes, laughing and jesting all the time. They are always equally merry, like happy children.

*February 28th.*

We pass through more large rocks. I see some red spots upon several of them, which I mistake for artificial marks, but the boatmen undeceive me, and tell me that they are the eggs of an insect.

In the morning, on the left side, we pass the mouth of the Nam-Ma, which flows into the Black River, after passing over a large bank of shingles. A great many cormorants are fishing in it.

The sandbank where we lunch is covered with butterflies, and our men join Thou in chasing them.

I take a walk through the woods, but it does not produce much results, though the vegetation is curious, for I penetrate a real forest of banana trees; some of them are from seven to eight yards high. We can walk in the shade beneath them quite comfortably, but all is silent; animal life seems to have deserted these

regions. The dead leaves are still hanging from the trunks like a fantastic dress ; the whole scene is strange, and one fancies that an antediluvian landscape must have been just like it. For my own part I soon weary of the calm and solitude, and prefer returning to the river side.

In the evening we witness a spectacle which is both grandiose and alarming, for part of the mountain is on fire. A crackling, which is heard even on the river bank, first announces the scourge, then we see columns of thick smoke, followed by a strong red light ; a band of fire is licking the ridges and embracing the hills, surrounding them with a shining ribbon. One pass is outlined by the flames and appears against the sky like a gigantic glittering V. The river is quiet here, and reflects the fiery garland like the waters of a peaceful lake.

Instinctively I recall the illuminations which are lighted in our cities on festival days, the small lamps which decorate our monuments. How shabby it all seems compared to the brilliant radiance which we are watching here ! The scene is so wild, so grand, that I ask myself if it cannot be perpetuated more certainly than in our memory, and my apparatus is soon ready. Alas ! it is useless. The spectacle which we are witnessing is one of those which impress the sight, but which cannot be reproduced by any practical means ; science is sometimes powerless to transmit a thing so great in itself. Defining a perception sometimes appears to dwarf it, and it is better in that case to content one's self with the impression received, and to endeavour to recall it,

Although we are astonished and dazzled, I am conscious of another and a painful sentiment. I love trees, I love forests; I have a devotion, a kind of respect for woods, and, however beautiful it may be, I cannot help feeling a pang of regret as I see the work of destruction performed by these wild people, who wish to enjoy to-day without thinking of the morrow. Those who lighted the fire have only yielded to the necessity of obtaining food. They clear a space for the cultivation of their rice, and when the harvest is over they go and repeat their ravages elsewhere, for space is not lacking. The earth is full of life, and vegetation is powerful in these climates, so a thicket will soon recover the waste land. But how many years are required before a giant ficus will again rear its strong white trunk one hundred feet?

After all, is improvidence for the future limited to these poor Meos? Is it the attribute of savage races only? And the incendiaries of the forests of the Esterel, of the pines on the Alps or the Pyrenees, should they not be considered still more guilty, on account of the civilisation which ought to teach them better things? Before throwing stones at others let us took at home, and we may, perhaps, become more indulgent.

The night has been warm, the rocks hold the heat, and encamped at the bottom of a large ditch we suffer from it so much, that we hasten to start in the morning, and are on foot at an early hour. The whole day is passed in shooting the rapids, which succeed each other almost uninterruptedly. The rocks which line the banks bear clumps of azaleas, their red flowers producing a superb effect. Some of our men gather

the blossoms and place them in their hair. Here the river makes a great bend in the shape of an S, and having followed its windings we enter an open space filled with shingle banks. Laïchau is in front of us, standing upon a promontory, with one spur advancing between the Song-Bô and one of its affluents, the Song-Na. The hill has been cleared of wood, and is covered with footpaths winding over its slopes. The houses of the village are of a gray tint, blending with the general colour of the landscape; the two rivers below roar boisterously as they rush together in turbulent rapids. At the extreme point of the promontory, the first thing we see is a kind of huge carcase of bamboos several yards high, formed like a triangle standing on its point, ornamented with rags and odds and ends of stuffs. This scaffolding would have perplexed us if we had not heard of the death of Deo Van Tri's father. A little higher the tricoloured flag marks the French post, and we cross in a ferry just as we did at Van Bou. Some native women are bathing in front of us; they enter the water, squat down, raising their petticoats as they bend until they finally wind them like a turban round their heads.

We are received at the post, where we install ourselves; only a French sergeant and a few militiamen now occupy it, for since the district has been pacified the garrison has been considerably reduced. The chief of the district lives opposite, so I send over by the interpreter a letter that M. Vacle has given me for him and some messages that I received in Paris from his nephews, who are students at the Colonial School.

On the morrow he pays us a visit. In appearance

he is a tall, stout man, with a slightly flat nose, rather bushy eyebrows, a few hairs on the chin, and a habit of winking his left eye. From a racial point of view he does not show any clearly defined type, but is rather Chinese, mixed with Thaïs, and with something of the Yunnan mountaineer. Whatever origin his features may betray, they indicate energy, strong will, great intelligence, and above all power, the consciousness of his strength. I have seen a great many Orientals and of every kind, but I have never met one so European elsewhere. By European I do not mean civilised, but I mean a man who understands quickly, often with only a hint, anything one wishes to say to him, and who knows how to answer immediately, how to say what is and what is not, what can be done and what he believes to be impossible; in a word an Asiatic with whom one can come to an understanding, or rather know what one has to expect from him. For although trustworthy and confiding to his friends, this personage is not always easy to deal with, and he is very cunning. With regard to us, he looks upon us as brothers and acts towards us as he would do towards M. Vacle, whom he adores. We have, therefore, every reason to praise him. He even astonishes me by the liberal manner in which he understands true hospitality. We are not accustomed to such proceedings amongst the Chinese, and, in my opinion, the study of his character would be quite sufficient to show that he was a half-caste. Such an assemblage of apparently contradictory good qualities and defects can only be found in people of *mixed blood*, who combine in themselves the most varied atavic phenomena.

He is now in mourning for his father, who died a

few months ago. His head is shaven and he wears a white turban, which he frequently removes during his visit; he has a gray tunic or *ma kouazeu*, and wide white trousers; his feet and ankles are wrapped in linen bands, with gray slippers worn over them.

The conversation is easy, he does not speak French, but he frequently understands it, sometimes even sooner than the interpreter. In any case, no one has better opportunities for learning languages, for in his own district thirty-two idioms are spoken, and he knows most of them. Chinese, Thaïs, Meo and Annamite are equally familiar to him. Deo Van Tri is certainly an extraordinary personage. His name, although familiar to all those who have been in Tonkin, is probably unknown to the majority of my readers; it is therefore necessary, after introducing the man, to give them some information about his origin, his history, and his present position.

Deo Van Tri, in Chinese Deo Van Ki, the son of Deo Van Sen,[1] is called Vuei-Sin by his equals in China. His name is Cam Houm in Thaï, and he has seven brothers whose names all commence with Cam.[2] He tells us that his forefathers were natives of Canton. When the Mings fell, two centuries ago, his ancestor, a Chinese general in the service of the fallen race, came to Tonkin with a group of partisans. They, at first, settled at Bac-Ninh, but afterwards his family was

[1] Deo is the Chinese and Annamite surname which belongs to all the brothers, sons, nephews, &c., of Deo Van Tri. Van is a particle which serves to unite the name to the personal name. Ki or Tri, Sen or Seng, &c., are the personal names.

sent to the Black River by a king of Annam, of the dynasty of Lês, to wage war against piracy. For thirteen generations the Deos have resided in Laïchau or its neighbourhood.

The history of Deo Van Seng and his sons is very confused, and its repetition here would be difficult and not very interesting. I have read a chronicle, dictated by the chief of Laï to a Cambodian interpreter, which relates the perpetual wars which for the last twenty-years have devastated the country between Laï and Luang Prabang. Deo Van Seng, named by the King of Annam Quan fou de Theng, and chief of the sibsoug-chou-Thais (the twelve Thaïs provinces), aided by his sons, Quan chau de Muong Laï (this is Deo Van Tri), and Quang chau of Muong Kanaï, fought for the Court of Hué, sometimes against the Chinese Hos, sometimes against the Siamese. Acting upon *instructions sent by the King of Annam to the mandarin of Muong Luang* (*Luang Prabang*), the latter made peace with the Deo family. But the Siamese are perfidious; they inveigled Deo Van Tri's brothers into an ambush, made them all prisoners and sent them to Bangkok. This crime could not remain unpunished. At the head of 300 men Deo Van Tri descended to Luang Prabang "to confer with the mandarin on neighbourly terms;" but his men could not agree with the Laotiens. A discussion arose between them which degenerated into a quarrel, they came to blows, and the city was burnt and sacked. These events took place in 1887. M. Pavie, who was then at Luang Prabang, alone with four or five servants, saved the King and held a conference with the chief of Laï, who then retired.

To render this account intelligible, we have been

obliged to skip the period of the conquest of Tonkin by the French. Acting under Lu Vinh Phuoc's orders Deo Van Tri took arms against us, and even fought under the walls of Tuyen Quan as one of the enemy's lieutenants. Now the war is over with us, with the Siamese, and with the Chinese pirates, the districts of Laï, Theng, and the sibsomchou-Thaï are tranquil; and, thanks to the skill of men like Pavie, Vacle, and Pennequin, we have obtained, by peaceful measures, not only the complete submission, but better still, the the support, of Deo Van Tri and his relations. The minister of the Emperor Hamghi, Tuyêt, vainly tried by promises and threats to entice the chiefs of Laï to join him when he fled from our troops, and endeavoured by forced marches to reach a refuge in China; they allowed him to pass through the country, but they would not follow him. At present, Deo Van Tri tells me, he is at Canton, where he receives 300 piastres per month, raised for him in Tonkin by some mandarin conspirators.[1]

The French Government has nominated Deo Van Tri quan fou de Dien Bien, and pays him 100 piastres a month; his brothers, quan chau de Laï and quan chau de Tuangiao, receive sixteen each. These titles are only disguised excuses for giving them a pension. In reality, Deo Van Tri is master of the Upper Black River; his family (about four hundred members) govern under him, and since the death of his father he has absolute command over it. His

[1] I said in a pamphlet (*Une Excursion en Indo-Chine*) that recently the admissions of some captured pirates and some papers that have been seized seemed to prove that Tuyêt was

authority extends so far that he can even forbid his relations to use opium; he trades with the drug, but considers that the use of it is fatal.

Deo Van Tri is therefore a dreaded and powerful feudal chief, who has rendered and will again render us great services. When Colonel Pennequin wished to open a campaign against Doc Ngu he summoned Deo Van Tri to come to him at Hong-Hoa and act as his adviser. His struggles with and against the pirates have made him thoroughly acquainted with them. "My family has fought with them for a long time," he said to me. "I have seen them and know them well. You may repulse them, but you will not crush them, either in the Delta or on the frontier. To get rid of them and completely subdue them you must strike at Pekin!"

The territory over which he rules extends far to the north of Laïchau, and several days' march on the right bank of the Black River. We seem to have forgotten this when we provisionally divided the country with China, but this omission can be easily remedied by the Commission of Delimitation; we hope that it will come to some understanding with the Chinese authorities to avoid injuring, by diminishing or dividing his territories, this great chief, who is one of our most useful partisans in the north-west of Tonkin. Even beyond the districts which he governs directly, his influence makes itself felt as far as the Yunnan to the north, and the middle of the Sibsompannas to the west. His assistance was extremely useful to the Pavie Mission, which he personally accompanied into the centre of those provinces. The Chinese have

sin (colonel), and give him the right of wearing a transparent light pink decoration for nothing. Since he has been with us, he seems to have been at variance with the authorities of the Celestial Empire ; but, however, this did not prevent Muong-La, Manhao, Mongtzé, and other cities of Yunnan paying him homage on his father's death by sending caravans to him laden with presents.

It is said that the English themselves have endeavoured to make terms with him; unless we are willing to attribute to chance alone the presence of an English consular agent, a great traveller in the Shan countries, who speaks Thaï perfectly, on the boat which carried Deo Van Tri to Haïphong. The interview was short, and not very profitable, I fancy, in its results for the representative of Great Britain.

But because Deo Van Tri assists us, it must not be supposed that he is entirely devoted to us ; he is the friend of a few Frenchmen rather than of the French nation; his feeling is a sympathy of persons rather than of races. It is therefore very desirable that he should be bound to us by mutual interests, and from this point of view it was wise to give him the contract for the transports on the Black River ; the rates are fixed, and the revictualling of the posts is profitable to him. The tea trade forms a still stronger link between Deo Van Tri and ourselves. The Chinese tea district of Ibang is situated about eight days' journey from Laïchau, and its tea gardens are celebrated throughout China. The leaves, compressed into round cakes, are sent on the one side to Thibet, and on the other as far as Pekin ; they are even used at the Emperor's table. Now M. Bourgoing Meiffre has concluded a

treaty with Deo Van Tri, and the latter is to forward to him annually 6,000 piculs of tea from Ibang. The chief has fifty mules, and can hire as many more. Three months ago sixty piculs were sent off, and while we were at Van Bou another 100 piculs were despatched; 120 more will start in a few days. M. Bourgoing Meiffre pays thirty-four piastres and a half for each picul delivered at Hanoï, that is about one shilling the pound. The French merchant can sell the tea on the spot, in China, at Canton, or perhaps even send it into France. The leaves require scenting before they suit the public taste, but the expense will be very small compared to the enormous benefits which the reduction of the custom duties gives to our colonial productions.

On the whole Deo Van Tri is satisfied with his bargain, for the transport costs him very little, since his pirogues must go down to fetch up supplies of food for the posts, and the profits on the tea trade now compensate him for the losses that he has made on opium and cotton. This last article, which we are told formerly sold for thirty piastres the picul at Mongtzé, is not worth more than twenty piastres there now, and as it costs fourteen at Laïchau the difference is not sufficiently remunerative, after the freight has been paid.

Besides his commerce, his continual excursions to the right and left, and his voyages, the Thao (as Deo Van Tri is surnamed in his house) is passionately devoted to hunting. The hounds are thick-set, generally fawn-coloured, with black noses and short tails; from twenty to thirty of them are requisitioned in the neighbourhood. They are fastened in groups in the

same way as in France, and seven or eight men hold them, a few are only used as bloodhounds, to search the wood. When the retreat of the deer is once ascertained, the pack is thrown off upon the hill; the chiefs ride and their servants follow on foot, while all are armed with rifles, and they fire upon the animals as soon as they can.

Hunting is not considered incompatible with mourning, which is worn and observed with the greatest care. Deo Van Seng has been dead about three months. We arrived too late to be present at the funeral ceremonies, which, the sergeant tells us, were very curious; bonzes were summoned from China, and a great many sacrifices were made in honour of the deceased. For more than a month one buffalo and sometimes two were immolated daily; the animal was suspended by its hind feet to a gallows sufficiently high to prevent its fore feet from touching the ground. Each member of the family had then the right to give it a blow with a double-edged knife until at last they cut its throat. Buffaloes, pigs, chickens and rice do not cost the chief anything, for they are levied, like the statute labour. Moreover, everything that is productive here, that is harvested, produced or killed, passes before Deo Van Tri, and he retains the lion's share; this is the feudal law, and no one seems to complain of it. Even now provisions are daily carried to the *manes* of the dead. His tomb is inclosed in a bamboo hut, surrounded by a paling, and ornamented with small flags. The scaffolding, which we saw as we arrived, is on a platform above the rock, which towers over the confluent of the two rivers and the valley of the Song Bo. Deo Van Seng will not

lack anything in the other world, for the objects which he used in his lifetime are carefully arranged in the interior of the hut—his clothes, his pipe, a supply of opium, and a small pirogue. Thou tells me that a great deal of gold has been placed in the tomb, and in his materialism our boy thinks that the money would be far better in his own pocket; he would have more to lose at gambling. When we arrived in the evening at moonrise, we heard plaintive cries and strange howlings proceeding from the funeral inclosure. The Thao cut them short by imprisoning the mourner, one of his sisters, who is a widow and in great despair, because, through the strictness of the *rite*, she is forced to wait three years before she can marry again.

The reader will see that while staying at Laïchau we do not lack subjects for observation and notes, or for interesting studies. But we cannot stay long either here or anywhere else, so we must occupy ourselves with the means of continuing our journey. I explain to Deo Van Tri my favourite scheme of ascending the Black River, forming a caravan to go to Xienhoung, and from there trying to get into Burmah, Bhamo, or Mandalay. The first part of the journey is very feasible; the members of the Pavie Mission have travelled along the route that passes by Poufang; but it is very bad and requires a great deal more time than I supposed; at least thirty or forty days. Another and better road leads through the Yunnan, but it is twice as long.

There have been some disturbances at Xienhoung; and the Queen has just been dethroned. Nevertheless, Deo Van Tri assures me, that with a letter from

him I can travel anywhere, but without his protection I should be stopped at Poufang. Now we have only to secure some means of transport. The chief's mules are at Ibang, where they have gone for tea; they will not return for a fortnight. As soon as they arrive forty of them will be placed at our disposal and we shall only have the men to pay for. "You are a friend of Vacle," adds Deo Van Tri; "I will lend you my mules; you can keep them as long as you like. Take them to Thibet, or to the sea if you wish; when you have finished with them you have only to return them."

No one can make kinder proposals, so we decide to wait for the return of the luggage mules, and utilize this enforced delay by making an excursion to the high table-lands which extend above Laïchau. A cousin of Deo Van Tri accompanies us and acts as our guide. Camkoui, lituong of Laï, an old travelling companion of M. Pavie as far as Manhao and Lao-Kay, is a fine tall man, with a frank open face. He wears a white Chinese dress, a turban and a pigtail. Amiable and clear-headed, he knows a few words of French and understands it readily; we are extremely pleased with him. We have four small horses; three of them cost forty piastres each, for the prices have risen in consequence of an epidemic which broke out last year. One has been given to me by Deo Van Tri; it is a white cob from Mongtzé belonging to the Yunnan breed. Well built, with a broad chest, strong neck and shoulders and small head, the race is very clever and strong for mountain work. This is the only one that is shod. Twelve coolies carry our luggage. The Thaïs decline this work, which they consider beneath them; they

Tchas, Kas, whom we shall meet with elsewhere, belong to the most miserable race of Indo-China. Their name signifies *servants* or *slaves;* and, in fact, they are always treated as such by the other tribes, perhaps because they have been conquered with their brothers the Penomhs, Steings, &c.; they are generally regarded as autochthones, cousins of the black race of Australia, the Negritos and the Papuans. Some of their customs are curious. One of their tribes, dwelling on the right bank of the Black River, makes, with fish, all-spice, and other condiments, a very strong ferment, which is placed in small bamboo tubes; the liquor is drunk by sniffing with the nose. The specimens that are now before us are very ugly and seem badly built; one of them has a goître. The legs, small with disproportioned calves, often surrounded with bands of linen, remind me of those of the djirinska men of Japan. Some of them have straight green lines painted round the mouth; and the lituong tells me that those who are ornamented with these drawings belong to the tribe of *Tchasheus*, which is also distinguished from the others by some differences of dialect. Although so miserable in appearance, these porters are excellent walkers. The stage is quickly completed, but it is true that it is not a very heavy one to-day. On leaving the post at Laï, the road winds over the hill, and then follows the line of ridge between the Song-Bo and the Song-Na; the country is well wooded, and near the top of a ficus I notice a banana with its roots inserted in one of the forks of the tree; it is a curious case. We descend into the valley of the Song-Na, which we cross in a pirogue, in order to sleep at Chinh Nua (pronounced Tienne New). This village was the residence and the

capital of Deo Van Tri's grandfather; it was Deo Van Seng who moved to Laïchau.

*March 5th.*

A hard day! When we left the woods at the end of an hour and a half's marching we began to ascend by a series of frequently very steep acclivities. The hills are entirely cleared of wood, and still bear traces of fire in the form of large black slabs; elsewhere reeds conceal the bareness of the slopes. We continue to climb until nearly two o'clock. As soon as we reach one ridge we discover a second and a higher one, and we begin to ask ourselves where this tiring excursion will end. It seems as though we are the dupes of an illusion, and that the hills mount at the same time as we do. At last, we reach a small terrace, which appears to be the ledge of the table-land. The view is superb over the valley; my barometer registers 5,220 feet. The woods recommence, and in them I noted some new species unknown lower down, amongst others, some splendid tree-ferns, some of them fifteen or eighteen feet high. Further on we enter a country which rather resembles the districts round Caophong and Molou. Since we left Laï we have seen only a slaty soil; here the calcareous deposits reappear, and with them the large natural basins. We can imagine, some millions of years ago, the sea covering these regions, with circular atolls appearing above the surface as they may still be seen in Oceania. The phenomenon is similar, only here we are 5,100 feet higher. Villages are rare, but here and there we see a few low huts inhabited by Meos or Yaos. Maize grows well, and it is cultivated

in the same way as in France by massing earth round the roots, but here two or three plants are placed together. The soil is rich, and some of the stalks are nine feet high. Charles, who comes from the Franche Comté declares that he has never seen anything so fine in his home. Some tombs are raised at different places on the hills, they are built in Chinese fashion, and always display a small terrace resting upon an earthen wall shaped like a horse-shoe.

The Meos whom we meet seem vigorous; they all wear a silver collar like those seen above Van Bou. We are told that the Chinese characters engraven upon the band of silver that forms it represent prayers and invocations against the evil spirits, and not as some writers have said the owner's name. The Chinese trade upon the simplicity of the mountaineers, and, persuading them that these inscriptions will secure a long life for them, charge very highly for the necklets in kind, at the rate of several sacks of rice. Already a few natives are wearing the costumes of Yunnan—the pointed straw hat, small white drawers, bands on the lower part of the legs, and sandals held in place by a strap passed between the great and second toes.

High trenches are placed at intervals by the side of the road to enable the porters to rest themselves by leaning their burdens upon them, and at the turnings, posts split at the top in the form of stars defend the passers-by from the influence of evil genii.

While following our road from basin to basin, and from plain to plain, we allow ourselves to be overtaken by the darkness. Fortunately the moon rises, and her light shows us two or three low houses, with a shed in front, and, fastened to its posts, about a dozen

horses. They belong to a caravan from Yunnan, which has brought some sugar and cotton goods; it will return laden with raw cotton. The inn is dirty and full of Chinese half asleep from the fumes of opium; to the stupefaction of the coolies and boys, I declare that I prefer passing the night in the open air. In five minutes the luggage is arranged in a horse-shoe, a shelter is established, a fire lighted, a piece of bacon, a few eggs, and some water, will make an excellent dinner, and we shall sleep with the sky as our roof, happier and quieter than kings.

The night has been fresh; we have had a minimum of forty degrees. The climate is temperate, and I notice some European plants that I have not seen lower down—some iris and wild roses. The inhabitants tell me that the country is healthy, and there are few illnesses. In summer they have the same temperature here as Laïchau has in winter; maize, cotton, and wheat grow well. If the tableland were more accessible, if only Lao Kay were connected with it by a regular line of steamers or by a railway, what an admirable sanatorium could be made here for our troops and exhausted officials! We have in Tonkin, at a lower level, the equivalent of the English health resorts of Simla or Darjeling, but at present the only inhabitants of these high plains are Yunnanaise tribes scattered in small villages of three or four huts. We visit some families of Yaos, about a quarter of an hour's walk from our encampment; they occupy four villages, which bear the same name as the whole of the plateau, Tafine. The houses are built of planks erected upon the ground and the horses are shut up in a kind of raised cage provided




YAOS (FULL AND SIDE FACE). TAFINE, MARCH 6,, 1892.

with a rack, they are fed upon maize. The population is amiable and receives us well; we are even offered a Chinese meal. The men are tall, of the mountaineer type, energetic and open, with a large forehead, prominent cheekbones, and slightly oblique eyes; they recall the Meos in appearance. Their costumes are not remarkable in any way, but the women wear small broad black drawers, ornamented with white designs, an apron, and a jacket ended by two wide lappets, and cut like a Robespierre coat; cowries or white beads are sewn on the back, and long silken fringes fall over the front. I have never seen this curious dress anywhere else. They usually wear a large turban, but on state occasions they put on a hat of a kind of oil-cloth which forms an immense visor; the chignon is then waxed, hardened, and gathered into a small peak, upon which they place the curious headdress; two points passing from the extremity of the peak rest upon the forehead; they use Chinese foot-gear. Their dialect is quite different from the Meo language; they are divided into Lam Tin Yaos and Tinpan Yaos; the former wear the hair Annamite fashion, the latter have the pigtail.

The people of Tafine tell us that eighty years ago they came from Quantoung. The table-land was densely populated at one time, but the inhabitants took fright when they heard of the arrival of the French and fled away; they are now beginning to return. Here they live by agriculture and commerce. Our hosts possess six mules, and their caravans fetch cotton from Nam-Ma and carry it to Yunnam, where they obtain bars of iron, saucepans, and opium (iron is sold for five piastres the picul at Mong-Tzé).

Owing to the pressure of the *lituong*, we are able to buy several complete costumes without any difficulty; but it is impossible to find any manuscripts or *pang-pas* like those which Mr. Bourne sent to London, and M. Vacle to the School for Oriental languages. The best that I can obtain is a book in Chinese characters, which they tell us is 200 years old. In the afternoon we return to our night's lodging at Tai su Kiao. Before leaving I usurp the functions of doctor and give a consultation to the chief of the district; the latter has complained of colic for some days, and he wishes for some tafia. I explain, to his great regret, that brandy is very bad in his case, and give him some bismuth pills; he thanks me, but somewhat sadly.

When we reach the extremity of the plateau I cannot help thinking of the magnificent racecourse which could be made here; one mound seems expressly destined for the erection of a grand stand. I mentally plan all the necessary arrangements, and find a place for the paddock already marked, nothing is missing. A town may some day be founded here. The ancients, before they established themselves anywhere, installed their lares as protectors of their homes. In Asia, a mosque, a pagoda, or even a simple shelter where sticks of perfume may be burnt, is erected. We others, men of civilisation and progress, first look out for a racecourse; at Hanoï the grand stands were built before the hospital. After all, it may be that the English have spread the fashion of horse-racing as a means of diffusing their language. Now there is not a single part of the world, not one coast, that has not its racecourse. The result is a population of horses

spread all over the globe, with English words always sounding in their ears, since it is universally admitted that they do not understand any other idiom!

In the evening we commence the descent into an immense valley, which opens before us like an abyss of which the bottom remains unknown, veiled by the mists. We stop in the midst of the woods at the village of Sa-ko-san (literally, San mountain of Sako, Cardamom).

We are still amongst the Yaos; the women are occupied in dying stuffs in tunnels dug in the earth and filled with indigo. Upon a terrace, overlooking the valley, seven posts, four or five yards high, terminated by seven circles, like certain monuments in Thibet, support some planks on a platform. I am told that once a year the people come and play music on these scaffolds in honour of the spirits.

Here the natives seem a good deal preoccupied with religious beliefs. In the house where we passed the night an old man is busy praying, and we are careful not to disturb him. Seated upon a stool, he recites his prayers before a small piece of furniture which serves as an altar, and while he speaks he gets rid of some small sheets of white paper which he holds in his hand, and pretends to read, he then burns them, rises and recites some litanies, while with one hand he shakes a stick terminated by some rings, which clash together, with the other he takes a cup of water, carries it to his mouth and spits upon the altar; then squatting down again, he sounds his rings, throws some water about with the point of his stick, and ends by pouring out the rest: he finishes the ceremony by burning some more paper. Five cups containing

water and saffron stand before the altar; a chicken plucked but not cooked is laid upon a cup, this is removed when the old man has left.

*March 7th.*

We continue the descent through the woods, and find ourselves obliged to walk all the way. This stage takes us to a village consisting of a few houses inhabited by some *Yans*. They are cousins of the Thaïs (their dialects are similar), but they dress like the Chinese; the women have a blue turban which crosses in front and recalls the bow worn by the Alsacians. Like the Yaos, they build upon the ground itself. I notice some papers and some inscriptions in Chinese characters, and find that the majority of the people understand this language, which Cam Koui speaks to them. They tell us that they came here two or three years ago from Phong-Tho (in the province of Loa-Kay). Some of them have a red circle upon the forehead, marked by the cupping glasses which they use for headache.

Fishing is their principal industry. I see cast nets, hand nets, and small wicker traps hanging on the walls. They have gardens surrounded by palisades in which fennel, garlic, cabbages, turnips, white radishes, and a plant with large leaves upon which they feed the pigs, seem the vegetables chiefly cultivated.

Whilst we are installing ourselves a caravan of eighteen mules passes by; their load is placed upon a small wooden saddle, which is balanced upon a pack saddle without a girth. This method of loading is used in Yunnam and Setchuen. Each animal carries




WOMAN AND MAN (GIANS). BOU TIAN FINE.

one picul of cotton, bought upon the Nam-Ma and sent to Mongtzé.

In the evening our attention is drawn towards a series of detonations, which seem to come from a neighbouring hill; they are too frequent to be attributed to sportsmen, and I inquire if by any chance a war is going on here, but the natives hasten to explain the cause of the noise—some woods are burning, and the bamboos are splitting, so there is no reason to trouble ourselves about it.

*March 8th.*

A few minutes after starting we pass a wooden scaffolding recalling the stone *toros* placed at the entrance of Japanese temples. Here two vertical beams ornamented with a trellis of bamboos support one horizontal one. The whole edifice marks the boundary of the village land, and on one day of the year consecrated to the invocation of the spirits, no one but the inhabitants is allowed to cross it; in some centres the festival is repeated twice a year.

Although villages are rare, the road is pretty well frequented, and we pass some more caravans of salt and cotton; the plant is cultivated in this district by the Yaos. We see a few natives busily grubbing with mattocks in some soil that has lately been cleared of its wood by fire, and in the morning we pass through a small Yao village. The inhabitants assert that they are natives of Kouitcheou, but they must have left that province about twenty years ago.

They have a great variety of fishing tackle in their houses. Near the altar stands a lance decorated

with a red cloth, some cocks' feathers and some squirrels' tails; there are a few tombs, which consist of mounds of upturned earth surmounted by a pole which carries a rag; at one extremity three flat stones form a niche, in one of them I see a pair of Chinese slippers.

Another few hours' march through the same rising ground, where the road makes continual zigzags as it winds amongst calcareous blocks, which seem thrown down by accident, and we reach the banks of the Nam-Ma. This left affluent of the Song-Bo is from thirty to forty yards wide, and flows noiselessly in a stream of very clear water over a bed of shingles; it can be forded anywhere. The people fish in it with rods; they stand at the head of a current and cast their lines backwards and forwards with a movement that reminds me of the trout fishers at home.

We follow the river sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other till we come to the village of Nam-Ma, where we halt. Sadly fallen from its former wealth, this commercial centre, once an important market town of brick houses, now contains only one street, a dozen Chinese huts, and a few Muong buildings. The black and yellow flags have passed through here driven back by the French, and their departure has ruined the prosperity of the little town.

Caravans from China only come here three or four times a year, passing through the Yao villages in the neighbourhood. The latter possess some forty mules, and trade during three or four months when there is not too much water in the torrents. Opium is worth two piastres and a half the ten tens here; a picul of

comes from Hanoï, and is sold for four or four and a half piastres the picul.

Fishing is carried on as well as these commercial operations and agriculture. The river is very full of fish. We certify this ourselves by throwing in a cartridge of Favié powder; in a moment we have filled more than five baskets with fish, amongst them I remark some superb carp, similar to those of our countries.

A few hundred yards beyond the village the Nam-Ma throws itself into the Song-Bo. At the confluent of the two rivers three pirogues sent by Deo Van Tri are waiting for us: we dismiss our coolies after paying them (twelve *cents* each man per diem, and three *cents* each for food), and send our horses back by land. We then embark to recommence the voyage already made to Laïchau which takes a day and a half. Our boats are very small, and badly laden so that we cannot sit down in them, the least movement makes them turn, and it is with much pleasure that I see the promontory of Laï appear in sight. During our absence the great bamboo carcase that ornamented the tomb of Deo Van Seng has fallen, a gust of wind has blown it down, and one of Deo Van Tri's brothers, Camhoung, has broken his leg hunting. We are told that to cure it the bone has been laid bare, and a pulp of chickens newly hatched and then crushed has been applied to the wound, and carefully bandaged over it, yet the invalid believes in a speedy restoration.

The newspaper also tells us that two French officers have passed here and are now at six hours distance, at Nam-Muong, the former residence of Deo

Van Tri, who is there at the present time, but they will come back on the following day, March 11th. One of them is M. Massie, apothecary major to the army, a former member of the Pavie Mission. For the last five years he has been in Laos and the surrounding districts as agent for France at Luang Prabang; he is returning from a tour in the Sibsompannas; the second is M. Gassouin, a lieutenant now commanding the post of Dien Bien Fou. Both of them advise me not to go to Xienhoung. It is now the middle of March and the mules have not yet arrived, so that we could not reach Xienhoung before the end of April, and then we should just encounter the rainy season for our return through Burmah.

M. Massie invites me to go with him by Tali-Fou (there is one road which, from Laï, will take us there in about fifty days), and from thence (if we once get to that city) we can try to reach Kin-Cha-Kiang. I own that the idea is very attractive, and the enterprise would be delightful, but unfortunately we are not in any way equipped for such an expedition, and we have not the necessary time to spare; another thing, if I enter China I must give up seeing Laos, that is to say, abandon one of the objects of my journey. After much discussion, and consideration, we resign ourselves to going, by Dien Bien Fou, to Luang Prabang, where M. Massie will precede us, and a Cambodian interpreter will be sent on before us. I am not sorry to get rid of lazy Cho-Ken so quickly, for his information, when he gives us any, is very defective. His former master, Deo Van Tri, when hearing us speak of him, shook his head, laughing, "Cho-Ken is not good. I sent

him to Hanoï" (Cho-Ken pas bon, faire divé Hanoï).

As we are now weeding our troop, I do not hesitate to dismiss another rather useless member. Baptiste is paid, and moreover he is content for he begins to find his profession rather tiring, and has discovered a source of wealth, which is more easily earned, by trading with the Meos. I wish him a safe return and good luck ; and determine to manage without replacing him. Thou declares he is as good a cook as he is major-domo, and for the banquets that we are likely to make we do not require a great culinary artist.

Before starting again, we say good-bye to Deo Van Tri. Our intercourse with him has been most amicable during all our stay at Laïchau, and now he offers us a complete collection of the costumes of the country, in return I present him with a large bore rifle for elephant shooting. M. Pavie had told me that the chief has long wished for one, and I found that the gift was received with much pleasure. Thanks to the letters we brought to him, and to the recommendations of his friends, we have found every possible assistance provided for us by the Thou of Laïchau. He has given us all the information we have wished for, and has answered all our questions with the greatest kindness.

Every one is well informed respecting the fauna of the country, for here every one hunts. We are told that elephants are numerous at a week's march from Laï, towards Poufang. The wild cattle, with short yellow hair,[1] are very dangerous ; last year two

[1] Probably the *Bos gaurus*.

hunters were killed by one of these animals. The rhinoceros is becoming rarer; five or six years ago some of them were killed within a few miles of Laï. Deer, tigers, small-sized felines, large civet cats, with ringed tails, and monkeys are found in great abundance; amongst the latter are found the large gibbons with extraordinarily long arms. A native has given me the skin of a reddish-brown gibbon, marked with a stripe upon the head. The species seemed new at the Museum, but unfortunately I have only a flat skin, without a skull and with two paws missing. A great many peacocks, silver pheasants, and bee-eaters are killed for their plumage, and the large *buceros* for their extraordinary beaks, they utter the most discordant cries. As a rule, the members of Deo Van Tri's family hunt all day long, and fire at everything that comes within range; consequently they are often short of ammunition, and our visit has been a windfall for them, for I have distributed several boxes of powder amongst them on condition that they bring us their booty.

As regards variety, the flora has nothing to envy the fauna, for the forests contain the most diversified species. Some of them may be utilized when the means of communication have improved and the spirit of enterprise has provided some capital even in the higher districts. Deo Van Tri assures me that teak grows opposite Laï, here it is called *tiet-tao*; benjamin is missing, cardamom is rare, but cunao is very common and is sent to Hanoï, but I am told that the trade in these tubercles is not very profitable.

It is the same with the mines as with the woods;

the cost of transport is still too great for them to be worked at much profit, and yet a great deal might be done with them. Copper is plentiful; beds of it are known to exist upon the right bank of the Black River, a few hours above the mouth of the Nam-Ma. Some specimens that I have seen appeared to me very rich and infinitely superior to those of the Deloustal mine. A native at Laï brought me a piece of almost pure copper ore that came from Tafine, and which probably weighs about thirty pounds. Five silver mines are known. Lead is very frequently found, and the pirates extract a sufficient quantity for the manufacture of their bullets. The mines in the upper part of the Black River have never been much worked, for at first the labourers were too heavily oppressed, and now the pirates are dreaded.

To this dangerous work and their uncertain profits, the people prefer agriculture, navigation (nearly all the inhabitants of Laï are boatmen), and commerce. Every winter a caravan of from one to two hundred mules arrives from China; they remain until the spring, separating into groups of two, three, or four, to go from village to village, to right or to left. The Chinese sell iron, sugar, oil, stoves, saucepans, vermicelli, opium, &c.; they buy, chiefly, stags' antlers, medical ingredients, and cotton. Formerly the province of Laïchau annually produced from four to five hundred piculs of cotton, now the amount has diminished to one hundred. According to Deo Van Tri this reduction is due to the competition at Mongtzé of the spun cottons that come from Chang-Hay or Pakoï.

I shall not dwell now upon the commercial situation of Laïchau or upon the possible traffic up the Black

River, for I wish to reserve my views upon these questions for the last chapter of my book.

Having left our collections and our heavy luggage to be sent down to Hanoï, we have only a few absolutely necessary things to take with us, and these must be carried by porters. We have only to see them loaded, to thank Deo Van Tri for his kind assistance, then steer for the west, on the road to Mekong.

# CHAPTER VI.

**From Laïchau to Luang Prabang—Start from Laïchau—Muong Moun—Legends—Plain of Theng (Dien Bien Fou)—Traces of the Siamese—The French Administration—Sop Nao—The first Siamese Post—In a Pirogue—The Nam Ou—Muong Ngoï—A Religious Grotto—Details on the Khas—A Laotian Evening—Mekong—Pakou—The Arrival at Luang Prabang—The Consulate.**

FROM Laïchau we go to Dien Bien Fou in five stages, for though the journey can be accomplished in three, we are delayed by our coolies. On the first day we left late and only advanced about nine miles. Until we stop at the foot of the hills, at Muong Toum, the road lies on the banks of the Nam Laï; the slopes have been cleared of wood half the way up, but above that height the trees are covered with white blossoms which give them from a distance the appearance of large orchards. The bottom of the valley is rich and well cultivated, it contains numerous villages. The itinerary given to me at the post mentions 260 houses. I should think that the number had increased, for there must be at least 2,000 inhabitants and a great many people are seen on the road. The women wear dossers fastened with braces or by a strap passed across the forehead, they then cross their arms, behind them. I often notice tattoo marks upon the hands,

chiefly of blue stars. There is little variety of head-dress; it always consists of a blue or white turban with lappets falling on each side of the head and framing it; but as a rule we only see the women's back, for as soon as they perceive us, even from a distance, they turn round so as to hide their faces, and often pretend to pick up wood on the road, but they appear less timid in the houses. Thou endeavours to make friends with them, and with the lituong Cam Koui, who still accompanies us, he acts as interpreter, acquitting himself very well in this new profession. He tells us that there are some sick people in the village where we are sleeping, but "their recovery appears to be certain; for some pieces of linen and of hempen thread have been suspended in front of their houses, some music will be played, and the spirits which now torment them will certainly be appeased."

*March* 15*th.*

In the hills above the valley of the Nam Laï. There is very little water until the evening, and consequently very few villages, except a few Meos houses. A small pass has to be crossed, from which there is a superb view, for at our feet lie the Nam Laï and the fields which it irrigates; further on we perceive the great gap in the hills produced by the confluent of the rivers, which meet at the foot of the promontory of Laïchau, and in the distance the woods extend as far as we can see, covering the rounded brows of the mountains, passing from light to dark green, from glaucous to bluish tints, and finally disappearing in the mists of the horizon. We are still at a fair elevation; the barometer registers 3,560

feet, the temperature has lowered; it is not more than sixty degrees. Sao shivers and wraps a towel round him for a mantle. As we descend it becomes warmer, and as the large trees reappear at the same time, we are once more surrounded by a tropical flora. It seems as if the flowering trees of the summits, which recall the species of our countries, were only abortions, stunted specimens by the side of their brothers in the valley. In the virgin forest we see many beautiful birds of variegated plumage, and I bring down a superb great horn owl, of which the men eat the flesh.

The end of this stage is marked on the banks of a stream by the remains of a shelter. The place is called Sah Long, and it awakens terrible memories in the mind of young Thou. "Yen has a great many tigers (tit)," he tells us, as he fills his saucepans. "When M. Macey came here a tiger killed one horse and wounded another." We can only draw nearer to each other. Some huts are quickly constructed of bamboos and banana leaves, they are open in front and face each other, so we cook in the middle of them, eat as we sit round the fire, and go to bed early. In spite of the threatened dangers the night passes without incident.

*March 16th.*

A good part of the day is again spent in the midst of the woods, the road is fair and less uneven than yesterday's; we are passing through a forest of bamboos; their trunks are gigantic, of the thickness of a man's leg, and they rise in a single stem to a great height, then bending as though their own weight was

too much for them, they cross their tops, so that we could believe we were passing under the arches of a natural cathedral. Every kind of architecture is represented. Here are rounded pillars, others ornamented with arris; there is the ogive, and further on the semi-circular, traves and architraves, low, damp, gloomy vaults and high, bold, graceful arches, full of daylight; nothing could be stranger than this timber work, erected by nature, to support a canopy of verdure, which shelters travellers from the rays of the glowing sun. Masters of the soil where they have grown, the bamboos seem to have driven all other plants away; for the ground is clear, and walking is easy and pleasant under them.

In the distance we see some oaks and trees with pink flowers, which recall Judas trees; large glades open in the midst of the woods and in crossing them we have some good opportunities of shooting. The flowers attract the birds, which fly amongst the branches in search of insects, like a swarm of bees seeking for honey. The country is full of game; traces of deer are on all sides; some large animals take flight at our approach. Sao seized a Winchester and is lucky enough to kill a fine stag (*Rusa aristotelis*); it is taller and larger than any of the stags of France. We stop to cut it up at once, for we are short of fresh meat, and not at all averse to varying our bill of fare, which always consists of eggs and chickens. Our *chef* having put some pieces on one side, the coolies divide the remainder among them, wrapping their share in banana leaves to keep it fresh. This unexpected windfall puts the whole party in good spirits; Sao receives a perfect ovation, and we start with renewed

cheerfulness. We sleep in a village at Moung Muon. The chiefs receive us as kindly as usual, and I take advantage of their good-will and of the light to take some portraits. The women sit well. One of them is celebrated here and is considered a great beauty; her pale complexion, curved nose, thick lips and large black eyes remind me of the Jewish type. As to the coolies, they are frightened, and, like those in Thibet, implore me on their knees not to photograph them. Before I can induce them to sit for me, I am obliged to open my apparatus and show them that it does not contain anything dangerous. In the evening we perform on the ariston organ, and our hosts greatly appreciate the music. We offer them some knives and pictures, and in their turn they bring us some manuscript books of songs. I had two of them translated at Luang Prabang. In spite of the naïve character of the subjects and of the comparisons used, I think it will be interesting to quote them here, and I have endeavoured to reproduce as faithfully as possible the simple version given by the interpreter.

"A man and a woman are much in love with each other. But the girl's father and mother will not give her to the young man but upon one condition; he must adopt the trade of weaver and learn to work, the girl shall then be given to him in marriage.

"The lover says farewell to his future parents-in-law in order to go and trade at Moung Noc-Fa; he earns thirty horses and thirty buffaloes, which he takes to Muong Ho for sale there. After making a profit of 1,000 piastres he returns home.

"On arriving, he learns that, with the consent of her parents, the young girl is promised to another.

Carrying a gun and a knife he accompanies her to the bridegroom's house.

"He says to the young bride: 'If you wash the plates, you must break them in several pieces; if you make sauce, take the large spoon and break the sauce-pans.'

"A great number of ducks are ravaging the rice-fields, and the father and mother send their daughter to drive away the birds. She is there from morning till night, but they do not move; overwhelmed with fatigue, the woman finds herself unable to drive the ducks away, so she returns to the house, where every one has finished supper but herself. She goes to the kitchen to find something to eat, but only a head and tail are left of the fish, and one wing and a claw of the chicken.

"The husband perceives that his wife does not behave herself well; she combs everything the wrong way of the hair, going from the tail to the head, and she breaks all the crockery. He takes her and offers to sell her to her former lover for a packet of banana leaves only. The latter, enchanted, keeps her, and she is his wife from that time."

## THE ADVENTURE OF KHOUNE LOU AND OF NANG HOU.

"Once upon a time there were two young girls, two sisters. They were named Kham Som, the elder, who lived at Muong Peang, and Nang Ngin Lieang, who lived quite near at Muong Saï.

"It was summer and the heat was excessive, so they both decided to go and bathe in the river. Then

Thene Fagna Ine (a man from heaven) perceived these two charming young girls bathing. He remained thoughtful for a moment, seeking some means of finding a drug of exquisite perfume.

"This drug was nothing but the fruit of a fig-tree. He let it fall into the current and pass before the young girls; they cut it in two and each of them eat one half.

"Having eaten, the elder gave birth to a boy, named Khoune Lou, and the younger had a girl called Nang Hou.

"Khoune Lou and Nang Hou loved each other from their birth, and they promised to marry. But Nang Ngin Lieang would not allow her daughter to wed Khoune Lou. She thought that it would create a scandal, as the betrothed were such near relations. She therefore accepted the first comer for her daughter, and gave her to Khoune Chaï, who lived at Muong-Mou, and who had asked for her in marriage. Nang Hou could not love Khoune Chaï; she said that if she could not be Khoune Lou's wife she would die. The poor girl's heart was on fire; she fled into the forest and there she grasped her throat so tightly that she died. Khoune Lou had the same feeling; he left his home, and walked knife in hand to the place where Nang Hou had died; there he stabbed himself with the knife and fell dead.

"The mothers of these poor children went to fetch the bodies and carried them home to burn them; they performed various ceremonies and built a pyramid, so that the remainder of the bones might be preserved in it."

*March 17th.*

We start again with fresh coolies, who are recruited without difficulty and do not cause us any delay, for the chief had assembled the men on the previous evening.

We pass through some more woods as we ascend the valley of the Nam Meuc, during one part of the day. At the entrance of Muong Poune, the village where we sleep, I notice a wooden gateway like those we have already seen; near it, upon a small board raised upon bamboo posts, stand some tiny baskets containing rice and provisions offered to the spirits; and around it some small straw covered chapels, contain sticks of perfume; in one of them I see a Roman cross.

Before dinner, we make our usual shooting expedition, and whilst walking by the river side we are surprised to see, at a turning of the road, two short very bronzed individuals, wearing white European clothes, trousers, jackets with copper buttons, helmets and slippers. Our astonishment only increases when we hear ourselves greeted in good French, but we soon enter into conversation, and the mystery is explained. We have met two of the Cambodian interpreters from Luang Prabang that M. Massie has sent from Dien Bien Fou to meet us, but we only keep one of them, Takiate; the other, Tchioume, is not well, and he is going to Van Bou to see a doctor and nurse himself. As he complains of suffocation, I give him some anti-asthmatic cigarettes, which relieve him. With a letter from M. Massie, Takiate brings us good news for the continuation of our journey; some boats have been




**OUR STAFF.**

Sao. Takiâte. Thou.

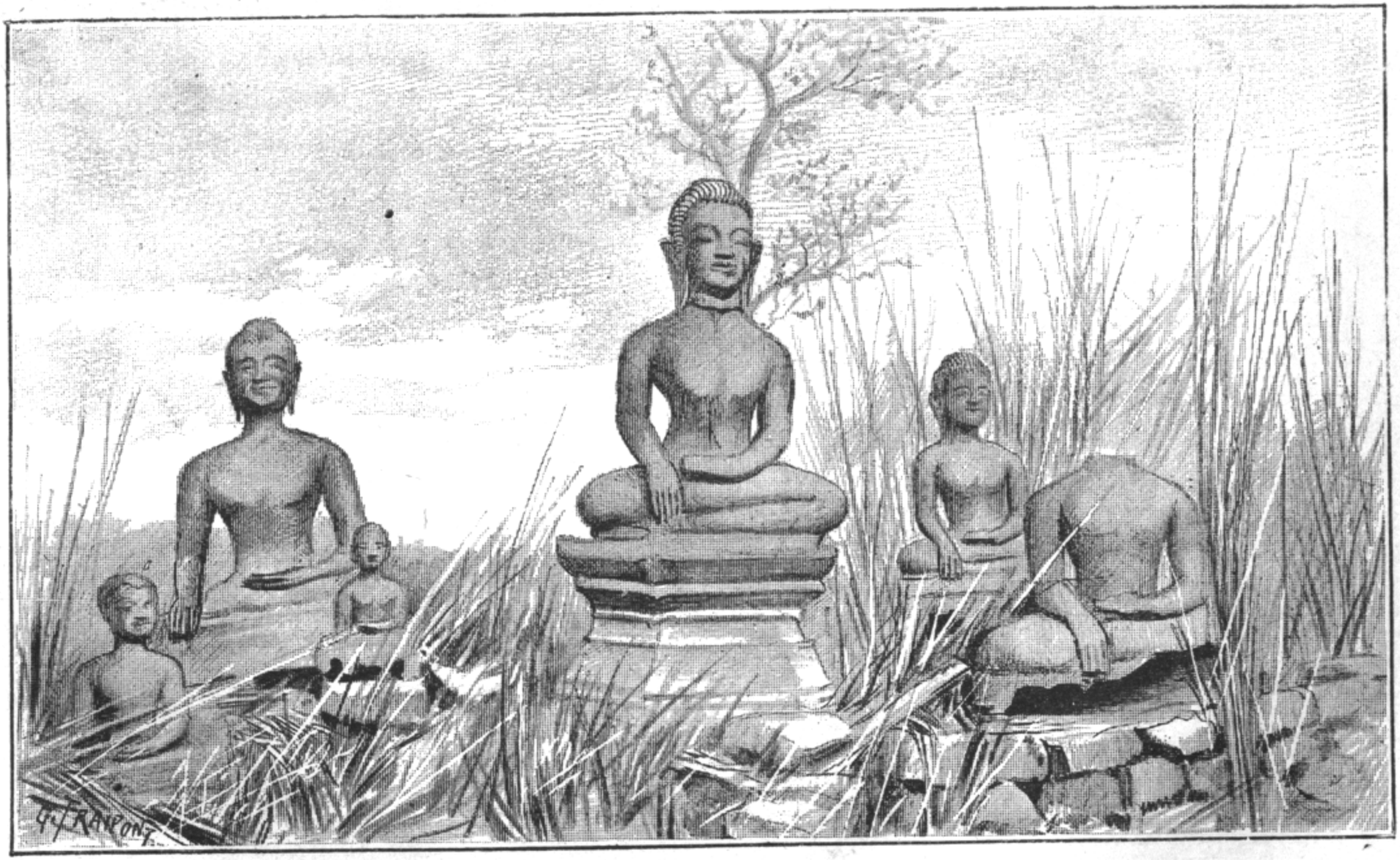
obtained for us on the Nam-Ou. We are lucky in not losing much time.

*March* 18*th.*

After some hours' march through the woods we descend, to pass into an immense open unwooded plain, which extends as far as we can see; in the distance some low hills surround it by a faint bluish line, which scarcely rises above the horizon. The plain of Theng is about eighteen miles long and very fertile; it was once well cultivated and supported a numerous population (100,000 souls according to Deo Van Tri). Perhaps the number has been exaggerated, but it is certain that the country has been completely depopulated by the Siamese. Following their usual policy, they deported the inhabitants to the distant regions of the Nenam, ruining this country for the advantage of their own kingdom. They took 12,000 Thaïs from Theng and sent them to Bangkok. A great many of them stopped on the way, and their restoration to their own country is one of those useful works to which M. Massie is devoting himself, even spending a portion of his own salary upon it. In one year he has more than quadrupled the population of the plain, and the number of houses in the village of Theng has increased from four or five to twenty-seven.

This depopulation and the waste of all this good land, which has fallen out of cultivation in consequence, are sufficient to recall to our minds the ravages of the Siamese, if they had left no other traces of their passage. The southern portion of the plain is bristling with small round hillocks, of which

the highest can be scarcely fifty yards. From a distance these great molehills hardly appear above the general level, and they do not spoil the harmony of the scene in any way, but when we get nearer some of them have peculiarities which strike the traveller, and first of all, at the summit of one of these mounds, half hidden amongst the high grass, we find a series of bronze statues. This is the first trace of the Buddhist religion that we have seen since we left Hanoï, and travelled westwards, for the figures are of Buddha, eight in number, and not more than a yard high. They are surrounded by bricks which, with the fragments of a staircase, point to the remains of a pagoda. This is probably the work of the Siamese or of the Laotians of Mekong; the gods all have (or rather had, for they appear much neglected) the same position. Their large faces, which are somewhat Assyrian, with curved noses, well-marked eyebrows, and thick lips, ironically compressed, are identical with those we found upon all the altars of Laos. The headdress forms little points, surmounted by a higher one, on the top of the head; the legs are crossed. On the feet a star or a Greek cross has been drawn in a circle while a cord forms a shoulder belt. The statues were formerly gilt, and, judging from the ashes which I find, perfumes were probably burnt inside them. At present the divinities are abandoned; no homage is paid to them, their limbs are falling off in the wind and rain, and I replace the heads upon several of them. Turned to the east, impassive, always in the same position, the Buddhas continue to watch the sunrise until a more religious people comes to extricate them from their neglected condition, to regild them




BUDDHAS NEAR DIEN BIEN FOU

and restore their former splendour . . . . or until some vandal traveller, some Karl Boch, transports their heads to the west, whilst their bodies remain upon their native soil.

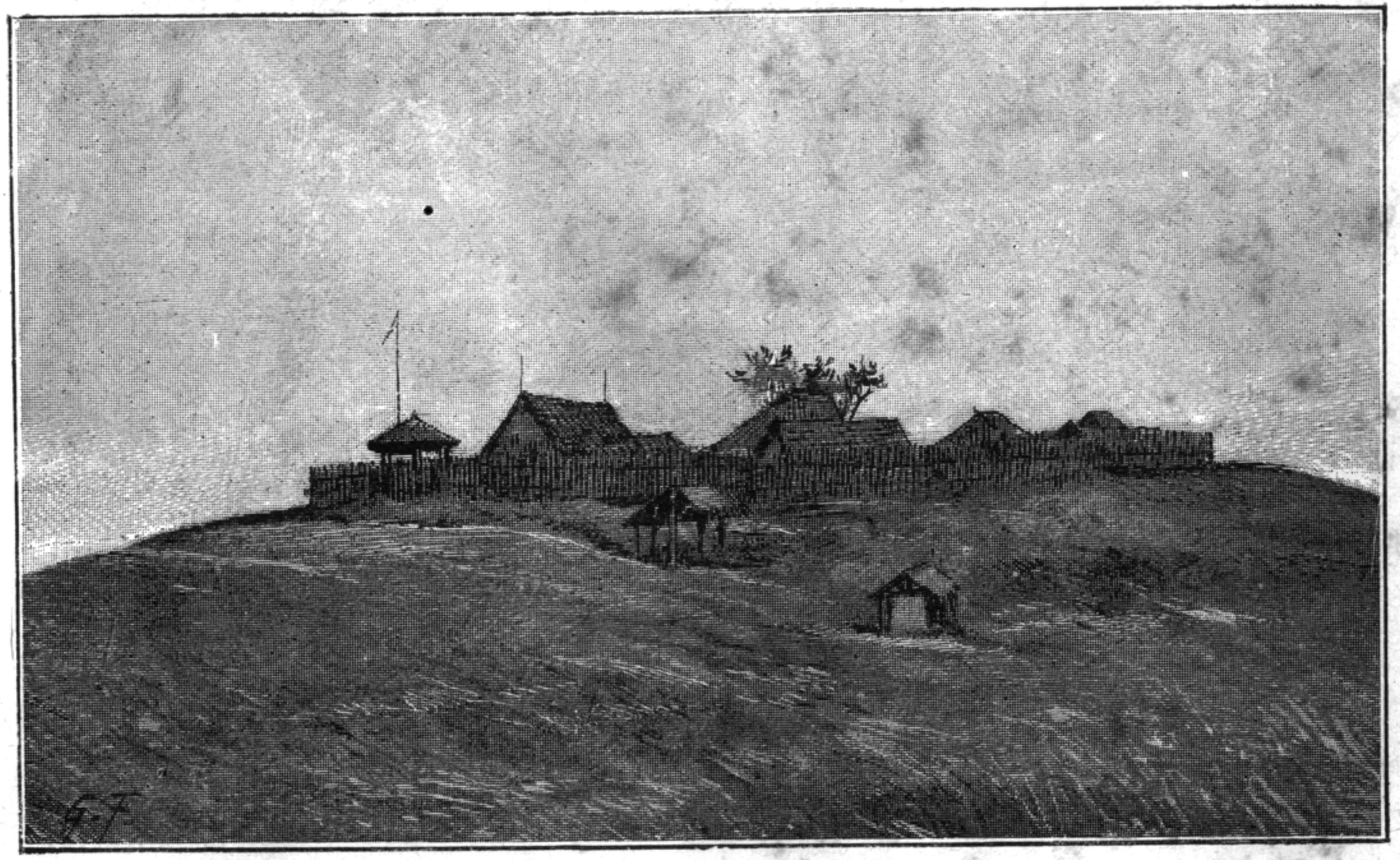
Further on, and nearer Theng, one hillock is covered with fragments of walls, the remains of Siamese fortifications. Opposite to them the French flag waves in the midst of our most distant post on the north-west frontier of Tonkin. Some five or six years ago it was occupied by Colonel Pennequin at the head of a company; the plain of Theng was then overrun by Siamese troops. They prudently retired before us, their chief urging as a reason for his coming the wish to prepare some boats for M. Pavie, and to provide an escort for him. At first we established ourselves a few miles lower down in the plain, in the middle of an ancient fortress. It was good policy to remove us to our present position on the highest point, from which we can overlook the plain. Fifty men commanded by Lieutenant Gassouin and two non-commissioned officers of the marines form the garrison; it is lodged in two or more huts built upon piles and one brick building, surrounded by a palisade, in the centre of which a *reduit* has been constructed of thick bamboos, placed close together and pierced with loopholes; the rifles are kept in this blockhouse, which is constantly watched, and where the garrison could take refuge in case of an attack.

A tree is growing in the inclosure. The inhabitants consider it sacred, and every one is obliged to respect it for fear of wounding their religious susceptibilities.

This post, which on the maps is called Dien Bien Fou[1] (an Annamite denomination), is of more importance from a political and administrative than from a strategic point of view. The officer in command fills chiefly the office of administrator; in fact, M. Gassouin is quan chau with two caïtuongs under him. Deo Van Tri is not liked by the inhabitants; and his authority has been set aside, but the Siamese influence is felt even here. Some of the quan chau placed at our disposal have taken the oath in the neighbouring territory, and the commanding officer has less power of enforcing his authority, because it is limited by superior orders. For instance, he must send an escort with the convoys, which go to Sop Nao (the first Siamese post), but he has not the right of accompanying them himself; he is obliged to ask the Siamese officer, who is allowed more freedom of action, to come to Dien Bien Fou to arrange about the routes. Under these conditions he encounters great difficulties in governing as he wishes; his sole resource is to take advantage of the divisions and rivalries between the various chiefs. The subsidies are inadequate for the payment of the different services, and the only way to fill up the empty treasury is resorting to fines; one pig for two stolen cabbages, and two piculs of rice for a fire lighted too near the post without permission.

The fines are converted into money from time to time and they supply the necessary sum from which

[1] Formerly the region was divided into two chaus—Muong Theng and Ninh Bien (now called Sop Cop). It is perhaps from the union of the two names, and an alteration of the former, that the appellation of Dien Bien Fou has been obtaind.



THE THENG POST (DIEN BIEN FOU)

pirogues are bought, the sharpshooters are paid, and the coolies are requisitioned. The post was built out of the fines; the grant allowed for it was twenty piastres (£3 4*s.* 0*d.*), yet more than 3,000 bamboos had to be cut for it. M. Gassouin exerts himself to improve the position of the inhabitants. The plain is rich and would be very productive if vegetables and plants were introduced; the garden belonging to the post already produces great results, the cabbages are superb. When the district becomes more populated the mines may be worked; iron ore is found, and it is said that coal is not unknown.[1]

As to commerce it is insignificant. Theng is too far away from other centres, but M. Gassouin hopes to create a local market here, which all the natives of the country-side would attend. During our visit, a caravan of forty horses led by some Chinese encamps at the foot of the post, it is a portion of the annual convoy from Yunnam, which passes by Laï Chan. The traders have sold their opium and stuffs to the Laos, and they are bringing back some cotton cloths, but they have not been able to sell their iron saucepans. The lieutenant buys a piece of calico about forty yards long, it comes from Laos and bears both English and Chinese marks. No matches are to be found here.

The inhabitants of Theng trade in cattle, they have just brought twenty-three animals from Laos (seventeen of them are bullocks), which they are going to sell at Tuan Giao and even at Van Bou.

With regard to the products of the village itself,

[1] I have seen some specimens of coal which M. Massie picked

the natives endeavour to make an exorbitant profit out of the post, and M. Gassouin has been obliged to establish an average rate of prices: $7\frac{1}{2}d.$ for a chicken, one $\frac{1}{2}d.$ for an egg, 2*s.* for a picul of rice; and he has made the sale at this price compulsory.

The natives, who are now governed with justice, begin to find M. Gassouin's rule more advantageous than that of a mandarin, they even go so far as to entrust their children to him; one of the sergeants has transformed himself into a professor, and he now has five pupils. A school has been created, benches and desks have been made out of wooden cases, and black boards have been cut on the spot. A great difficulty then presented itself, the sergeant could not speak the Thaï language, but what apparently seemed an insurmountable obstacle proved nothing in his hands (without wishing to compliment ourselves, I have always found Frenchmen far from home particularly ingenious). Our schoolmaster first shows his pupils some objects, then tells them their names, he writes them down, then teaches the children first the syllables, then the letters. The little scholars copy, remember, and finally understand; some of them can say a few words already. In writing they found great difficulty in holding the pen on one side, instead of grasped like a paint-brush, but at last they have managed it. They are more industrious than children with us, for when the professor leaves the room, they continue working uninterruptedly. In the villages the children play very little; one sees them sitting impassive, their arms crossed, dreaming or rather resigned before their time; one might suppose that fatality had stamped them with its finger from their

infancy. Here the sergeant has taught them to play at ball and puss in the corner, and these games amuse them very much; but in spite of the education which they are receiving, they retain certain hereditary characteristics inherent in their race. The present pupils are all sons of chiefs; a young peasant was admitted amongst them, but the sergeant was obliged to send him away, for his aristocratic companions kept him in quarantine.

In itself an administrative and intellectual centre the post of Dien Bien Fou, also serves to unite Luang Prabang with Tonkin, for through it pass all the money destined to pay the salaries of M. Massie and the Consulate staff, some provisions and the letter-carriers; two interpreters take it in turns to travel between Dien Bien and Luang Prabang, and an escort accompanies them to the rivers.

We shall follow the same track, but only after the lapse of a few days; in fact, we have to wait until our coolies are assembled. Our delay is not lost time, we have plenty to do besides the notes we wish to make, and the days pass always quickly when Frenchmen meet together so far from home. The neighbourhood is full of game, and peacocks are very plentiful; we set some traps, but do not catch anything; in the evenings lighted by the moon we chat freely upon every subject; distant fires illumine the plain; I wind up the musical boxes that I have brought with me, and the familiar airs of our native land give much pleasure to those who have been so long away from their homes; then a train arrives with some newspapers; the lieutenant seats himself upon the front of one of the boxes, we group ourselves in a circle round him,

longing to hear the news that he reads aloud to us, our hearts beat in sympathy as our thoughts fly far from Theng, to some corner of the beautiful land of France.

Before we leave the effective force loses a member, one of the Muong sharpshooters dies of rheumatism of the heart; the body is placed in a coffin, which is carried to a grave dug at the foot of a hillock; one of the men takes the branch of a tree and turns towards the tomb with the gesture that we make in sprinkling the holy water; the father of the deceased then puts a little earth upon the coffin, and the other mourners follow his example, the grave is then closed; in two years it will be re-opened and the bier will be taken out and carried back to the dead man's native village; sometimes the people use cremation; but the sharpshooters rarely die at the post; if they are ill and think they are in any danger they ask to be taken back to their own villages, to pray there with special ceremonies (*tchimtchimbouddah*), but they frequently die on the way.

*March 23rd.*

Our coolies arrive late, so we content ourselves with going to the other side of the plain to sleep at the village of Ban-Loun. M. Gassouin accompanies us as far as the Nam-Kom, which we cross by a ford. A little before we reach the river we pass through a rectangular space, two hundred yards wide, by about four hundred long. Its measurements are marked by fragments of walls, for it is the old Chinese fort, in the midst of which the French post was first established; but here it had the disadvantage of being

on the level of the plain, and therefore exposed to a surprise, whilst the new position overlooks the whole country, and thus commands the highways from Sop-Nao, Laï, and Tuan-Giao. As yet Ban-Loun contains but four or five huts, for the inhabitants only settled here five years ago. They make an income by raising silkworms, as well as by agriculture, and they show me some beautiful yellow cocoons, which are destined to boil in a large saucepan of hot water. The silk is then wound into skeins. It is coarse and rough, but it sells at Luang Prabang for twenty-five times its weight in silver. A superior quality is worth fivepence for twenty grammes (about two-thirds of an ounce). The silkworms receive a great deal of attention. Mulberry leaves are given to them three times a day, and with the introduction of improved processes of working the silk, this industry should one day develop into a source of considerable wealth for the plain of Dien Bien Fou.

*March 25th.*

In the hills we follow the worst road that I have yet seen. It is good for the feet—neither too muddy nor too stony, but it is dangerous for the head. It has been badly cleared, so that we can only pass over it on foot, up a succession of rather steep ascents, and we are obliged to stoop every moment. Branches catch in our hats and knock against our guns. The creepers have to be separated, and unexpected thorns cover our hands with blood.

bar the way, and we are continually forced to make fresh circuits. A river has to be crossed, the Nam Nona. Our interpreter takes us into the deepest part, and the water comes up to our knees, but fortunately the sun is powerful, and will quickly repair the mischief.

We halt at three o'clock in the afternoon and the coolies refuse to go any further; they say that we should not find any water, and that there is a high mountain in front of us which cannot be crossed before nightfall. We have no choice but to listen to our men's advice and to resign ourselves to stopping here. Shelters are erected side by side, facing the streams, like the booths at a fair, a polygon of crossed strips of bamboo is fastened to a post to drive away the spirits and large fires are lighted; at the risk of being roasted we draw near to them and smoke ourselves to escape the wasps, which prey upon the refuse left by the passage of other caravans.

The coolies cook their dinner in bamboo tubes with some water at the bottom, a horn formed of laurel leaves above it holds the rice, this is the sole apparatus. In other saucepans of the same kind some banana buds are boiling, and some pieces of pig's skin are roasting upon sticks. When dinner is ready a strip of bamboo is peeled lengthwise from one knot to the next and forms an improvised bowl in which the meat is served. A handful of salt which we give the men is received as a great delicacy, for salt is rare and very dear here.

I take a turn with my gun before nightfall; but the jungle is so thick that I can scarcely advance. I see traces of some large animals which recall the excre-

ment of the wild yaks; they can only be attributed to bisons or rhinoceros. I am told that black bears are often met with in these mountains, and I see an animal fleeing from me, which I think is a wolf, but I cannot shoot it. Tiger tracks are very frequent.

The road to-day is still worse than yesterday, the march through the bamboos is particularly tiring, for we risk blinding ourselves at every step, and when we descend the hill the path is one prolonged slide, besides, we have to squeeze through narrow places, and to force a passage between the entangled and frequently thorny creepers.

With a lively feeling of satisfaction we emerge upon a cleared track two yards wide. Everything is relative; we can believe that we are now in a fine road, so we lift our heads and breathe again. From this point the territory is subject to the authority of Siam.

There are a few clearings on the heights, but the country we are entering is not so wild as the region we have left, a river about thirty yards wide flows at our feet; opposite, a temporary village formed of a few houses shelters the people who cultivate the rice-fields. We encamp in a glade, a little rain is falling, and it is the first rain we have seen for a long time, but our improvised huts of banana leaves prove sufficient protection.

Our porters are tired after their day's work, for they have marched well; they belong to the Thaïs or Sas races. One of them has three blue circles tattooed upon his breast, which he conceals with his hand when any one approaches to look at them. He

tells me that they were made to cure him of a chest disease.

*March 26th.*

After an hour's march by the side of the Nam Nona, we reach the village of Sop-Nao; the route that we have followed from Dien Bien is the one used by the couriers when the rivers are low, but during the rainy season they take a boat as far as Ban Ken Kout (two days and a half from Sop Nao), and from there they can get to Dien Bien on foot, in one day.

Although the region called Laos has not, properly speaking, any clearly defined frontiers, we may consider that we have crossed the eastern boundary between Dien Bien and Sop Nao. Here the country changes, and we appear to enter a more civilised world; the houses are still based upon piles, but they are better built than those of the Thaïs, and they are arranged in regular lines on each side of a street; at the entrance an empty hostelry is ready for travellers. We hasten to place our luggage under shelter, for it is raining, and we then leave our men to guard it. Accompanied by Takiate, I repair to the Siamese post, which is formed of a collection of huts rather larger than the others, surrounded by a palisade; there is no flag, but a great many women and dogs. The garrison consists of twelve men, in European clothes made of strong linen, and armed with Remingtons. The officer in charge invites me to sit down and take tea with him. He tells me that the boats are ready, and promises to give us a letter for the chief of Muong Ngoi. We leave him to superintend the arrangement of our luggage on board the boats.



THAÏS, NEAR DIEN BIEN FOU (FULL AND SIDE FACE).



Even in crossing the road I remark some differences between the inhabitants and the Thaïs whom we have just left. Here the men shave the head, leaving only a small circle of short hair on the top. The women wear only one garment, which is fastened round the waist. At first sight the type seems to me distinct from that of Thaï; I think it is rather more European, there is a look of Indo-Caucasian relationship. The face is paler and longer, the cheekbones less prominent, the eyes less oblique than those of their Eastern brothers. However, I am only stating a first impression, which requires confirmation. We are entering Laos itself, and shall soon be in a position to verify our observations. Nothing detains us here, our coolies are paid and dismissed, and we have but to start. We find four pirogues sufficient for our party; they are about ten yards long, but narrower than those on the Black River; the awnings are higher, and bamboos tied to both sides of the boats make them balance more steadily. The boatmen use two kinds of oars, which they manage sometimes with the aid of a bamboo ring as a kind of rowlock, sometimes with both hands only. One oar is small and made in a single piece, the other is larger, and has a wooden blade fastened to it by small stems of bamboo. The sail of a windmill gives a very fair idea of it. A steersman uses a similar oar in the front of the boat, to guide the pirogue through the rapids.

The boatmen wear a *sampot*, a kind of petticoat folded between the legs so that it forms puffed breeches; one of them has his legs tattooed up to the knees; the designs, half circles surrounding dragons,

are so close together that at a distance they look like drawers. Everything being on board and arranged, the tricoloured flag is fastened to the stern and we start on our way, descending with the current between large forests, or woods of bamboos; the river is only twenty to thirty yards wide and not very deep. There are a great many rapids, and at the last, Hat Si Long, we are obliged to take out the cases. We ship some water, besides which, it is raining, so that we are drenched from above as well as from below; we therefore accept an offer from a Thaï family encamped upon a sand bank, who invite us to warm ourselves at their fire. We begin to talk and find that our hosts were forcibly deported from the plain of Dien Bien, and that, after ten years' absence, they are returning to their home. They have a pirogue and a raft made of bamboos tied together, which carries their animals, fowls and pigs; we leave them after buying some cocoa-nuts which they have brought from the south. A little further on, the Nam Nona joins the Nam Ou, the new river, which is about forty yards wide, flows rapidly between, sloping banks covered with woods and brushwood. We stop for the night, a little below the confluent, at a small sand bank on the right. It is advisable to sleep on land so that our clothes may be dried at a fire, but in spite of our improvised shelters, the night is bad, rain falls perpetually, and we are kept awake by myriads of small mosquitoes, which are none the less vicious because they are silent. Our men lie down upon mats and this evinces a more advanced stage of civilisation than we have found amongst the Thaïs; in the middle of the night they suddenly jump up,

light a lamp and start in search of an animal, that has taken flight, to judge from their movements, though I do not see it. They afterwards explain their manœuvres ; one of them had seen a long myriapod, which they were anxious to destroy, as it is a dangerous insect. They say, that when it crawls over the skin it leaves traces of its passage, in long red painful and unhealthy streaks. I do not know whether this assertion is true, but at all events, they seem much afraid of the insect.

*March 27th.*

Before the start, our men fasten fresh bamboos to the sides of the pirogues, and place a thick row of palm trees round the bows, forming a small hedge. The effect is original, for we seem to carry a garden in front of us. In spite of these precautions, we ship several waves at the first rapid; it is considered dangerous, and we are not sorry to find ourselves on the other side, for the impression is very different when descending the river instead of ascending it; everything depends upon the steersman placed at the bows. The man must be very skilful, for he has to guide the pirogue, which moves with great rapidity, exactly between two rocks, one surplus touch of the oar would inevitably sink it.

Once out of danger the boatmen replace the water-pipe used on the Black River by the cigarette, which they put behind the ear after a few whiffs. They also chew betel. I remark that the majority of them wear a bracelet, made of two threads, on the right wrist. They tell us that it is a talisman—a kind of

luck charm, which is given to them when they leave their village to navigate or trade. In the morning we travel through a woody country full of game, and I kill a dog-faced monkey. Charles shoots a stag, and we see a great many wild cocks. We find some villages in the afternoon, and I get out at one of them—Sop Kin. It contains about twenty huts—small houses built upon piles like those of the Thaïs, but more elegant, and half hidden amongst clumps of flowering trees, orange groves, palms, cocoanut palms, and bananas. The mulberry tree is also cultivated for the purpose of rearing silkworms. The women are not so shy here as in Upper Tonkin. They bathe in the river without troubling themselves about us. One young girl is coloured yellow with saffron, and we are told that this is done from coquetry. Most of them wear a small chignon, in which they often place flowers. As a rule, the inhabitants appear careless and idle; but probably they need not work to obtain a living, for commerce is the usual occupation in this district. I meet some merchants selling salt that has come from Hong Hay by Luang Prabang. The commodity is in small packets wrapped in banana leaves. Its price is about one rupee for six pounds. In return they export chiefly rice and silk.

*March 28th.*

We pass between high calcareous cliffs, which are further apart than those of the Black River. In the wall on one side there is the opening of a grotto almost on the level of the river. The cliff is covered with drawings all round it, but the interior is only

a narrow passage, in which no one can advance far. The boatmen say that the Nam Ou fills it at high water, and then a great many cray-fish (?) are found in it.

The hills become lower, the river expands, and we arrive at Muong Ngoï, a rather important centre. The situation is delightful. The houses are built twenty yards above the river; they are made of woven and whitewashed bamboos, which produce the effect of walls. They contain two stories, and are built with very sloping roofs; the staircases with balustrades, balconies, and verandahs, are arranged outside. They might be taken for Swiss *chalets*, with something lighter, more original, and less conventional about them. But the placard in European letters, "Royal Siamese Post-office," throws a discordant note into the scene.

A Siamese lieutenant, in a yellow silk jacket, white cotton drawers, bare legs, and slippers, invites us to tea at his house. He inquires our names, and promises us some fresh pirogues for the continuation of our voyage. I take advantage of this visit to glance at the armoury of the post. It includes about a dozen rifles of all kinds for percussion caps, Remingtons, Thaï, Laotian, &c.

I take some photographs whilst waiting for the luggage to be carried from our boat to the other; the houses in the village are built upon piles; in front of them, I notice some round cages containing doves, and these being half enveloped in stuff to protect them from the sun, produce from a distance, the effect of Chinese lanterns.

On the summit of a hillock that overlooks the

earth in which some openings have been made, a wall in the centre surrounds a block of masonry seven or eight yards in diameter which supports a dome of white plaster, with gilt ornaments. Above it, there is a cone made of seven gilded circles, surmounted by a point, the whole edifice may be about fifteen feet high, and I remark some small reliquaries containing rough statuettes, of which the faces are half obliterated. The natives, whom I question, tell me that it is a fort, and in truth, a few cannons in that position, could easily command both sides of the valley, but at present they are missing. However, in my opinion, the monument is of religious origin; it reminds me of similar edifices in Thibet; but I cannot obtain any information either upon the date or the object of its construction.

As I walk down by the side of the river I find a very animated scene; prisoners are going to and fro with manacles on their legs, which do not seem to inconvenience them at all. Elsewhere, men are making rafts and cutting planks; some of them are sawing a tree; they work horizontally, in pairs, putting in wedges as they advance. Women are fetching water in buckets made of bamboo tubes; they take the opportunity of bathing, and do not seem hindered by any bashful feelings. There is a curious remark to make on this point: amongst the Thaïs of the Black River, the men never hesitate to strip themselves, and enter the water; but the women appear more reserved; here, on the contrary, they are the ones that feel no shame, whilst their husbands seem to avoid undressing in our presence. What can be the cause

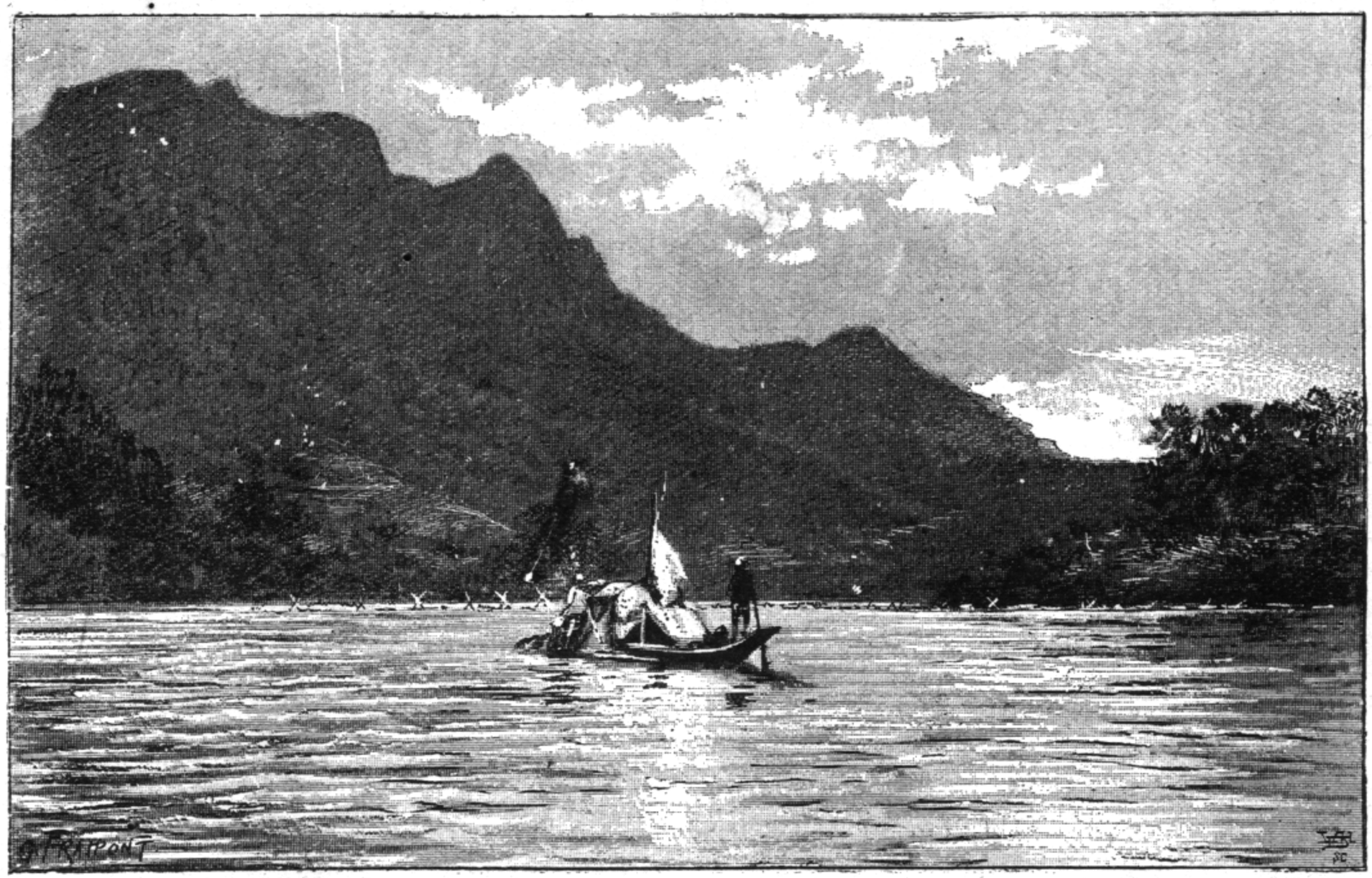
ence in the civilisations, or to a change in the customs produced by different religious ideas? Psychology must answer the question. I can only state the facts that I have seen.

We start about five o'clock. The declining sun brightens the landscape and enlarges the shadows. The Siamese houses look cheerful and gay amongst the green palm trees; behind them the broken fantastic outline of the well-wooded mountains is clearly defined against the horizon; one might suppose them to be gigantic ruins overrun with brushwood, and in the foreground on the river banks the perpetual movement of men and women going to and fro, attending to their daily work, animates the landscape. One turn and the picture vanishes as by magic, leaving in my mind an impression of gaiety and freshness which I retain for a long time.

Below Muong-Ngoï the river widens to 100 or 150 yards in breadth. In the narrower places some fishing traps have been erected: some bundles of three posts each are tied together at the top forming a faggot, in the centre is a basket full of stones, their weight keeping them in place. Between one bundle and the next a triangular net is placed, point in front; a man raises it by means of a long pole, which acts as a lever; when at work the fisherman squats, head downwards, upon a small terrace formed of bamboos. Several have covered their heads with a red veil, and their position reminds me of Mussulmans at their prayers. Here they are watching the water, and when a fish is caught they suddenly raise the net. I have sometimes counted seven or eight terraces

Fishing is one of the principal resources of the inhabitants of the valley of Nam Ou; they are forced to turn everything into money, for they are crushed by the taxes imposed upon them by Siam. The village, on the right bank, in which we spend the night, is inhabited by some people from Traniuh, who tell us that they left their homes three years ago on account of the cholera, they came to Luang Prabang in five nights, and from there they have come up here; but they do not appear to have gained any advantage from their change of place; they have fled from the frying-pan into the fire, for their new conquerors make each man pay eight rupees a year poll tax; they can remember a time before these heavy burdens were laid upon them, but now they can never satisfy the revenue collectors. A great many of them are forced to sell all their possessions. At first they refuse to let us have any provisions, and as we are now without food I am reduced to extreme measures. The villagers assert that they have neither fowls nor eggs in the place.

"If you do not rear poultry," I reply, "we may consider that all we find are wild birds," and I tell the interpreter to open a hen-house and take out two chickens, offering fifteen pence for them, which is, of course, accepted. When the owners have once examined the coins, sounded them and found them good, they regain confidence and bring us some eggs. Their distrust arises from the proceedings of the Siamese soldiers, who, as they travel, requisition everything they require without any payment; the villagers thought that we might do the same, but now they realize that we are honest people.



MY CANOE AT SOPHOUNE, ON THE NAM OU, MARCH 29, 1892.



*March 29th.*

The river narrows and forms a rapid, which is considered dangerous; and before he approaches it our steersman takes off his turban and rolls it round his breast, then he washes his face, kneels down like a Mussulman with clasped hands, then, raising himself, he strikes the pirogue several times with his hand; he is invoking the devil, who guards the rapids, and is begging him to grant us a safe passage. This prayer is a Laotian custom; for my own part the ceremonial inspires me with less confidence than our men's quick eyes and strong arms, which take us through the rapids without any check.

We stop for lunch at the village of Ban Sop Huan, on the right bank of the river; the houses form a street, like the one at Sop Nao; as usual two posts stand at the entrance of it; each has a piece of carved wood on the top, which, from a distance, resembles a duck or a chicken, some white scarves also are hanging from them; they are intended to drive away the evil spirits.

Under the houses the women are busy in various employments, and the young girls are separating the cotton from its grain. They use an ingenious machine for this purpose: a tray is placed upon a support about the level of the waist; above it, two rollers, one of iron and one of wood, turn in contrary directions, as the cotton passes between them it is freed from its impurities, which drop on one side, while the textile fabric falls on the other. One of the rollers is moved with one hand by a simple crank while the other is worked by the foot and a pedal

which corresponds with an eccentric, it is also furnished with a flywheel (the machine is made entirely of wood). After the cotton is cleaned it is placed in baskets, about twenty-four inches high and ten wide. When full they are sold for one rupee each.

Elsewhere the spun cotton is being dyed, while other women are making a blue stuff, crossed with yellow threads. They are seated, and use a weaving loom with two pedals, two shuttles, and three small boards. They throw one shuttle after the movement of the two small boards, and the other after the third. Tobacco is being dried on some bamboos and further away another group is winding silk.

On the whole, I find much more activity here than amongst the inhabitants of the Black River.

The children often wear a silver collar round the neck, and sometimes a bracelet on the ankles. Some of them are tattooed yellow, and a horse is represented upon the leg of one child. Men, women and children come to visit us whilst we eat; they bring us some rather pretty stuff for sale, and prefer money to payments in kind. The women consider our stock very attractive, but they could not sell it again. They accept some pictures as a present (these are easily carried and very well received in these regions), but their husbands take most of them away again.

An hour's halt is sufficient, and we soon enter a wilder country. On our right stands a perpendicular calcareous cliff, and a series of strata appear vertically on the surface. A fissure between two of them, like the one already noticed at Sou La, also marks the entrance to a grotto. The *Tham Pa Kouang* (grotto of

A staircase about twenty yards high leads to it; on the right a ruined house which leans against the rock is occasionally used as a lodging by some priests; red devils with large heads, armed with sabres, are carved on both sides of the entrance. The first hall is spacious; it is fifteen yards high, and the natural irregularities have been respected and even turned to account; the walls are decorated with green moss, and the ceiling is made of large stalactites joined and rounded. Upon the ground, upon the steps, upon isolated stones and in the hollows, everywhere, in the midst of the greatest disorder, a people of gods of every shape and every size has found a home. Statuettes from one yard high, to one or two inches, of black or gilt wood, of marble, bronze, or copper; gods standing with their hands raised as though in benediction; stout Buddhas, with bare heads, squatting down, their arms folded across their stomach, their shoulders often covered with a piece of stuff arranged like a cape; bonzes, saints, prophets and their servants, showing the same type as the idols of Siam. The whole Buddhist Olympia is united here, and when the idols are carefully examined, one believes that traces may be found amongst them of all religions and of all nations; here something from Greece, there a reminiscence of Egyptian art, while further on a marble head ornamented by a raised diadem, reminds one of the Khmer monuments. All these gods lie about everywhere, turned in every direction, hidden or fallen, often covered with dust; there is not a corner without its deity, and niches are often cut by the hand of man and ornamented with carvings of gilded wood, to shelter an exceptionally venerated saint. Even

animals are represented; in one rock two elephants are cut out and dyed green, each carrying a personage. In another corner stands a white elephant, one of the incarnations of Buddha. The body, which is about a yard and a half high, is made of wood and stuff, and the whole is covered with calico. Some small earthen cones, surmounted by a stick, are arranged in front of the sacred animal, forming a miniature garden with a tiny staircase. I believe they represent something analogous to our *ex-votos*. If I can believe the interpreter's explanations, these earthen cakes are placed here by people who have been ill and wish to thank heaven for preserving their life; the number of the cones corresponds with their age. The entrance hall, which at the first glance resembles an old curiosity shop, is lighted from the outside; it leads to other galleries, which we explored with a lantern. Corridor succeeds corridor, it seems as though the grotto were endless, and it must really extend for a great distance. Legend relates that it communicates with Laï Chou. Sometimes the passages are so narrow that we are forced to crawl through them, sometimes the rooms are large enough for us to stand upright. In some of them a bamboo bed denotes the sojourn of some pilgrim or belated fisherman. One division, which is reached by a rectangular entrance, is filled with a multitude of small divinities of the same size and form. This must be a reserve stock, for the walls are covered with red and gilt paper. Our candle diminishes, we must think of getting back. We have been walking nearly five hours.

Our pirogues descend the stream between well-

wooded hills, which appear full of game. I shoot some long-tailed black monkeys (gibbons), and wound a peacock, which I am unable to find.

In the evening some natives come and beg us not to enter the village near which we have halted, for a man has died there, and the funeral is being celebrated by a great feast, at which a good deal of tchoum tchoum will be drunk; our presence would be a constraint upon the guests.

We remain at the *sala* placed outside, and our boatmen assemble round us. I talk to them, and they tell me that they are engaged upon the pirogues for the benefit of the owner (usually a Laotian), who stands at the helm. To them a boat represents a large capital; the one in which I travel is worth sixty-seven rupees. As a rule the owner trades with them, a pirogue can carry about thirty-six thengs (a theng weighs about thirty-four pounds). The boatmen are chiefly hired from among the Kas; they are of small size, with very dark complexions and narrow foreheads; their eyes are close together, but the cheek-bones are not prominent; they wear their hair very short like the bristles of a brush. They are easily recognised as Laotians, but they appear inferior and weaker, though they are lively and prepossessing; they originally came from Ban Lasa (near Muong Ngoï), but they call themselves Khamouks, and count seven principal tribes of Kas; but their dialects differ, so that several of them cannot understand each other.

The Kasings (whose language approaches that of the Yaos).

The Khakos.

The Khabits.

The Khakoos.

The Kahoks (who wear cotton drawers as their only garment).

The Khapaïs.

The Khamouks.

They say that they do not know anything of their history, but add : that the Laotians are their brothers, therefore the Kas had compassion upon them and retired to the mountains, leaving the plain and the young shoots of bamboo to them.

Marriages are easily made amongst the Khamouks ; the young man's parents give sixty rupees to the girl's father and mother. After the marriage feast, the bridegroom sleeps one night in his father-in-law's house, then takes his wife home with him.

The dead are buried and not burnt; there is no priest, no religious ceremonies, but the master of the house cuts a fowl's throat and the mourners rub their knees with his blood. The men generally follow one stage in the bonzeries.[1] After a few months they are *little bonze* or Siang, then grand bonze or *Tit* ; a man who has not made one stage is *Ba*.

I do not know whether our boatmen have followed any religious courses, but they do not seem to trouble themselves about the future. One of them first tells me that he does not know what will happen in the other life ; then he adds that he believes he shall return to this world as a man, if he shows mercy during his lifetime, that is if he gives rice to the dogs and cats, or performs any other charitable actions ; if not his soul will pass into the body of an animal.

[1] I question whether this information does not apply more to the Laotians.

The duration of time does not trouble them either, they count the days like the Laotians, and their year consists of twelve lunar months of four weeks each, of which one contains eight days, at the end of a few years a month is intercalated. Dates escape them altogether. "The old people know them," they reply to our questions.

I am trying to make a lexicon of their language; they answer us, but sometimes we have a great deal of trouble in hearing what they say, and particularly in separating the affixes or suffixes, with which they can surround the same word. I notice the absence of special names for certain classes of things; they have no word for bread, and the names of the numerals, except the four first, are borrowed from the Laotians; lastly *mother* is called *ma*, the word in general use amongst nearly all the peoples of the world, perhaps because it is the first sound that a newborn infant instinctively produces, when it requires food.

From their own account, they have no special songs, but they use the Laotian music.

Writing is unknown to them; but they keep their accounts, or send their messages by means of small pieces of bamboo, marked with notches which are made at closer or longer intervals according to the signification that has been arranged. This is like our bakers' sticks.[1] Our men smoke a wooden pipe, with a small bamboo stem, like those of our countries.

[1] M. Harmand has found amongst the peoples of the south of Indo-China the same method of correspondence that Father Crabouillet discovered amongst the Lolos of Setchoun. (*Cf.* "Note on the Writing of the Indo-Chinese Khas," by M P. Lefèvre-Pontalis, *L'Anthropologie*, May–April 1892.)

They light it with a steel and a wick made of fibres taken from the bark of a tree. They also smoke opium ; Chinese caravans bring it to them raw, and they pay about a rupee for nearly three quarters of an ounce (twenty grammes), they cook it over the fire in a small copper cup. Three Laotians from Luang Prabang, who are also in the *sala*, devote themselves to the same work ; they are merchants, who have come to buy rice. The apparatus ready and the lamps lighted, each man lies down and we go to bed.

*March 30th.*

This morning Sao complains of colic ; yesterday evening he jostled a boatman and he now believes that he is the victim of a spell ; but his illness is not serious.

During the day the view becomes more extended ; the river widens, and it is dotted with a number of small rocky islands bearing a few shrubs. The vegetation on the bank seems transformed ; it approaches that of more southern countries than Upper Tonkin, and I remark some bread trees. There are numerous villages ; the natives wear pink or yellow scarves, for the inhabitants everywhere regulate the colour of their stuffs by the light which they receive. In Asia as in Europe, in Siberia or in Tonkin, in Norway or in Italy, it is curious to see that men, with respect to objects that change according to their caprices so much as clothes, always follow the law that nature imposes upon animals, that of adaptation to their surroundings. Here also we meet some Kas ; the men have a piece of wood or a bouquet of flowers in the lobe

of the ear, which forms a large fleshy ring, and their legs are tattooed. The women wear a small embroidered jacket; a deep blue turban with embroidered fringes surrounds a chignon ornamented by two round silver plates, joined by a small chain; chaplets of transparent glass beads are wound round them. The natives allow us to photograph them.

About five o'clock the valley becomes shady, and this is the best time of the day. With the exception of a few rapids, at great intervals, the river is tranquil; animals come out of the thicket and we shoot them on the banks. Our boatmen point them out from a distance and take much interest in the sport. They are in good spirits, and chat from one pirogue to the other, or sing in answer to the women, who are bathing at the water's edge. The men inquire if they are married, and invite them to follow them, in case their hearts are free. The songs, often improvised, are upon subjects referring to love. They also try to frighten the buffaloes that, half hidden in the water, only show their back and the head which they hold horizontally; but the great stupid animals pay no attention to the shouts, they let us pass, contemplating us with an air of fatalistic resignation; but they do not move. In the evening our boatmen ask permission to go to the village. We grant it and follow them, however a few are left behind to keep watch over the pirogues.

Here we shall have a first glimpse of the customs of Laos; this strange country where love is held in such great respect, that it might be called the kingdom of the flirt. We walk up to the town, and find in the centre a square platform raised upon four posts; from

a fireplace formed of stones held in position by woven mats a few logs are throwing a feeble light over the scene. A young girl is seated, a scarf of orange silk knotted upon one shoulder, cleaning cotton by separating it from the seed by hand. Near her stands one of our boatmen, in a small white cloth jacket ornamented with European copper buttons, he is paying compliments to her. Holding one of her hands, he takes out the flowers she has placed in her hair, and passes them through the lobe of his ear. Further on, upon the terrace of a house, another young girl is talking to her lover; a small lamp gives them light, and they are playing at dinner or preparing betel for each other. They will, perhaps, chat together every night, in this way, for several months, simply exchanging ideas before coming to a definite understanding—a marriage generally follows. In the square, a man is holding one of the Laotian bamboo instruments that resemble an organ; this one is two yards long, and the artist produces from it sweet solemn notes, which mingle with some faint songs. The listeners accompany the music by striking one hand against the palm of the other; instead of following the rhythm in three time used in Central Asia and amongst the Mussulmans, the clapping here continues uniformly and regularly. It is more monotonous.

Every one is quiet, there is no noise, no cries, no dances, but the stars seem more brilliant than ever; the air is scented; one feels happy in living, and if it were not necessary to leave so early to-morrow morning one could remain indefinitely dreaming, far from news, far from cities, far from civilisation, at the foot of the cocoa-trees in the valley of Nam Ou.

*March 31st.*

During the day we pass some fine rapids through which our steersmen guide us with their usual success; there are a great many islets in the river, and some of them are covered with a pile of the trunks of trees, which they have caught during the floods.

The sun is hot in the afternoon, and it penetrates into every corner of the pirogues in spite of the straw awnings; we are obliged to stop up the chinks with handkerchiefs and wrappers. The days pass very quickly in our boats; with reading, studying maps, notes, and photography, we have no time to get weary. Besides, watching our boatmen would be sufficient to occupy us, for they are a very interesting study; their chief pre-occupation is to point out some game to us, and with this aim they search the banks with their eyes. The steersman seems particularly fond of hunting, and he is doubly keen upon it now, for he has all the men to feed, so he is not at all sorry to give them some monkey flesh or a few birds, which do not cost him anything.

We shall also be glad to vary and lengthen our own bill of fare, for we appear likely to run short of necessary food at the stage; for the villages refuse to sell us anything, and we are obliged to use the same threats as the other day, before we can obtain any good from these distrustful natives.

Our men, however, have one resource, which I cannot make up my mind to try; they have picked up a kind of cricket on the banks, and after amusing themselves by making it chirp as they hold it between

two fingers, they throw it into the saucepan, and eat it stewed.

That evening no one goes to the village: it is not considered worth while, all the girls are married, so there is nothing to do there.

We all remain talking in the *sala*. Some candles have been made of yellow wax (sold in disks), which the men roll round a cotton wick by rubbing them both between their hands; the light is good. In the distance, the cpuaïs utter their hoarse belling, and it is comfortable to feel that we are under shelter, when, after a good dinner, we sit round a bright fire enjoying a pipe. We no longer hear the gradual *crescendo* of the giant frog, that came and lulled us to sleep in Upper Tonkin. This melody is replaced by music of another kind. In the middle of the night we are suddenly awakened by a loud voice, which sounds from a corner of the room, from the ceiling, or from a neighbouring tree: Tako, tako . . . ken, ken, ken . . . oh, oh, followed by a kind of hoarse laugh. The first time it is heard, we are astonished, and find some difficulty in sleeping again; we look about but cannot discover anything. After a little while, we become accustomed to the songs of the hidden guest, who speaks at night in every Laotian house. The natives know it well; sometimes they see it and point it out during the day, but they respect it as a sacred being, a household friend. An idea of protection, a veneration that is even a little superstitious, is attached to its presence in a house. . . . I see that in speaking of the singer I am acquainted with, I have forgotten the important point of introducing it to the reader.

large green *jecko* (*cordylus*), about a cubit long and three fingers wide, ocellated with beautiful spots of azure blue; a great insect destroyer, but quite harmless to man, by whom it is regarded as a friend.

*April* 1*st*.

Our boatmen remove the foliage which decorates the front of our pirogues; we have passed all the rapids—at least for the time. The country seems more populated, and the river banks are cultivated; I see some tobacco plantations, which appear well-kept; they are surrounded by palisades.

We still meet with fishing-rafts; but here the terraces support round huts with a rectangular opening in front; the bamboos are arranged above them to meet the current with a corner only, so that they should not catch the detritus, which would otherwise accumulate. From a distance, the effect of these buildings is rather like an enlarged beaver village, and we can imagine that the lacustral dwellings, of which so many remains are found in European lakes, must have resembled them closely.

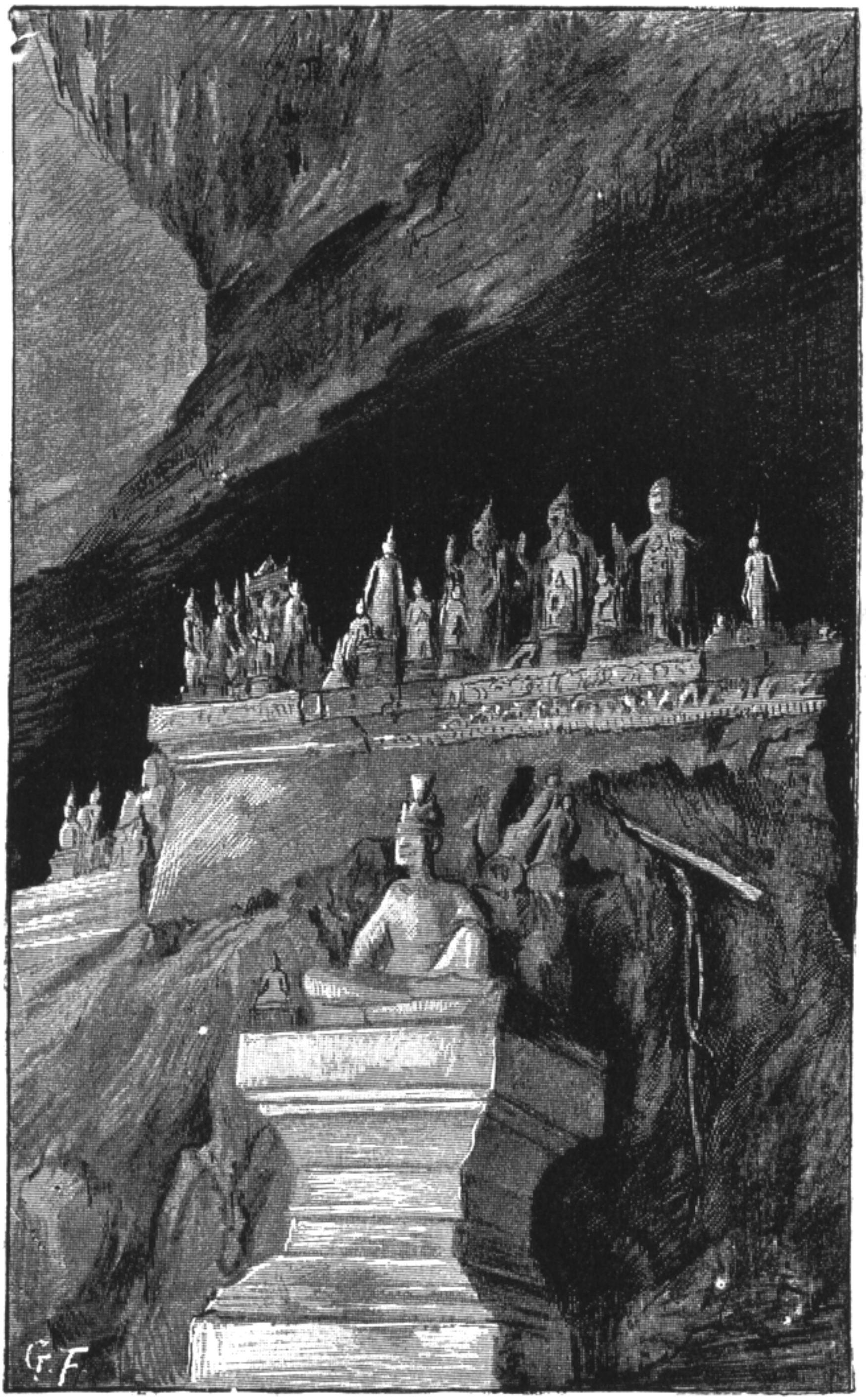
We pass rafts laden with rice, in the middle two straw mats are connected by a roof; there is a little terrace in front and another at the back. The whole is fifteen yards long, and the Kas boatmen slowly row them down the stream.

Some calcareous cliffs rise on our right and partially overhang the river; their base is worn away by the water, and birds fly in and out of the fissures. The wall is about ten yards high, and is ornamented with inscriptions and primitive red drawings.

A little further on the valley of Nam Ou opens and the river meets a stream of water of the same width quickly flowing between banks of low rocks, with small hills rising behind them. The new river is not unknown to us, for we are now on the Mekong. This is the third time that I have seen this stream, the powerful artery of the Indo-Chinese peninsula. I feel a certain pleasure in again meeting these waters, which come down from the mountains of Thibet we crossed two years ago, above Tsiamdo, and which will empty themselves into the ocean after they have fertilized the delta of Cochin-China. The Zatchow, lower down Lang Tsan Kiang, is here called Nam Kong or Meh Nam Kong, which Europeans have converted into Mekong. I cannot pronounce the name of Mekong without connecting with it some recollection of Doudart de Lagrée, of Garnier, and, of the members of the Pavie Mission, some thoughts of all the devotion and courage shown by those who have risked their lives in exploring the great river, believing that they were working for France.

Has De Lagrée then only succumbed in China to the fatigues of his patriotic enterprise, in order that the Siamese and English should reap the fruit of his labours? Shall we never see the French flag waving freely at the stern of gunboats ascending the valley of Cambodia as far as the Sibsom Panas?

Memories of the past and hopes for the future are making me neglect the present; I forget where we are, and it is not until some minutes later, upon putting my hand in the water, I notice the coldness of the new stream. There is a marked difference between the temperature of the waters of the Mekong and of




THE GROTTO OF PAKOU (THE INTERIOR).



the Nam Ou ; the former seem to have retained something of the chill of the snows from the high plateaux which gave them birth.

As soon as we are fairly in the Mekong, we stop on the left bank for luncheon, near a small village hidden among the cocoa-trees. A good road traverses it, and leads to the pagoda ; the women are working at the cotton, carding it with a sort of small bow, spinning and weaving it ; the children impress me by the fairness of their skin ; a great many wear bracelets on their feet. Hanging in the courtyard of the pagoda, I notice a bell at least two yards long, made from the hollow trunk of a tree, it is struck every morning and evening.

While our men rest, we are carried to the right bank of the stream, where there is a grotto in the middle of a calcareous cliff ; in front of the opening there is a kind of balustrade cut in the stone, and a staircase leads to the celebrated sanctuary of Pakou, already described by Garnier ; here only one room is found, and that is not very deep, but it is filled with religious objects similar to those at Nam Ou ; and we have the same experiences as upon that day, for we can hardly step in the midst of this field of gods for fear of crushing some of them with every movement. I notice several banners, some floating and others rolled up, most of them represent two divinities standing upon lotus flowers ; there is a small gilt chest in the form of a tabernacle ; and, higher up, a bell in gilt plaster, a form derived from the lotus bud ; on the sides of the room are white dragons with goggle eyes, showing their teeth. They are of Chinese design, a man (all are in plaster)

with his hands on his hips, is on horseback upon a pedestal, he also has tusks, round eyes and extraordinarily large ears; and on the ground, in the midst of fragments of innumerable prayers written in Laotian upon palm leaves, lie innumerable statues, some of them wearing chasubles; a few gods are riding upon elephants; while chariots are also represented by small wooden vehicles placed upon four wheels, and ornamented with pieces that overhang them like rostra. A series of small divinities are carved, each in separate medallions, upon painted panels of wood fastened in pairs; but it is quite impossible to describe everything, for taking into consideration the means at the makers' disposal, and the more or less æsthetic feeling which animates them, I think that one would find here everything that a people's imagination could devise to materialise its superstitions, to give bodily form to its beliefs, or to manifest its piety. And I cannot help thinking of certain grottos in Europe; of the statues, the *ex-votos*, the inscriptions and banners, the ogives which ornament them, and the crowds that flock to them. Pakou is also a shrine for pilgrimages; the people come from Luang Prabang with great pomp several times a year; they hold boat races, get up picnics, and pray. The grotto has another advantage for us besides its religious interest, for it gives us a fine view over the valley of the Mekong; but it is the middle of the day, and the light is so intense that the distance is lost in a trembling atmosphere of heat. When we return to the pirogues, I find it is more than 125 degrees in the sun, and my alcohol thermometer has burst.

we perspire but without feeling weakened; besides we are descending the stream, and as the wind comes up the valley it delays our advance, but it soon gives us a little air. The river is 300 or 400 yards wide; the banks are steep but low, the villages are numerous and always surrounded by small woods, while sea gulls wheel and cry over our heads. Our boats travel slowly; the men have fastened the two pirogues side by side, and like our boys they are busy washing and dressing before they enter the city. At four o'clock we pass the Laotian Custom House on our left, and, thanks to our flag, we are not stopped.

Here is Luang Prabang: at the first glance from the boat we can see nothing, or at least very little that indicates a city. For some hundreds of yards there are Laotian buildings on the left bank of the river, but their roofs are scarcely seen through vistas amongst the palm trees, cocoa trees, and bamboos, but the verdure gradually diminishes as the houses become more crowded and are arranged in more compact lines. We realise that it is an important city, an earthen mound dominates the whole, surmounted by one of those gilded domes, which recall the cupolas of the Russian churches. In the confusion of yellowish dwellings the pagodas are recognised by their superior height and by their roofs which are covered with brown tiles, laid one above the other and raised in Chinese cornices at the extremities, the palace has almost the air of an European building. Lower down, lying against the river bank itself, immense rafts, real houses of thirty to forty yards long, carry stocks of merchandise and of various commodities, regularly

stacked one above the other. Chinamen live in these floating establishments.

The bank only rises some fifteen yards, and the shallow water scarcely hides a few sandbanks, while the calm powerful river flows on in a muddy stream more than 400 yards wide. Like a high mountain or an old tree, the venerable giant of the forest, like everything that nature has made grand and strong, it produces a deep impression upon the traveller, which imprints itself upon the mind and causes him to pronounce its name with a kind of respectful awe. It seems that a religious idea is attached to the broad and tranquil Mekong, that it shares the sacred brotherhood of the Nile, Ganges, Niger, and Mississippi, in the past one of those rivers that have cradled the nations who filled the history of humanity; in the future one of the widest and deepest waterways open to the extension of civilisation. Our boatmen stop on the right side at a bamboo landing stage, a staircase cut in the bank leads to an edifice built upon piles and surrounded by large trees. It is a good sized house made of strong wood, with a gallery round it and a kind of kiosk in front, the walls and posts are painted green and red, or green and white; the roof is covered with bamboo thatch, and from its centre floats the tricoloured flag. We have arrived at the French Consulate, which contains the office of the company. M. Massie, and his second in command, M. Counillon, live here, and the surrounding houses are occupied by Cambodian interpreters; we are received with open arms and lodged in the *Consulate*.

# CHAPTER VII.

## LUANG PRABANG.

General Observations concerning a Laos State ; its Administration Population, Customs and Religion—The Town, the Banks of the River, the Market, the Pagodas and the Royal Palace.—New Year Festival, the Bird Market, Religious Processions, Dances, Songs at Night, the King's *cortége*—The Outskirts, Natural History, *Mouhot*, the Flora, Geology—The Trade, Exports and Imports, the part of the Chinese in it, the future of French Trade –Conclusions.

LUANG PRABANG, or rather Muong Luang Prabang, meaning literally "the royal town of Prabang," so named after a much venerated idol (Muong Luoung), is a capital, and gives its name to a small State of Laos, or a Shan State, to use the English expression. In this connection it may be remarked that the centre of Indo-China, and especially the region traversed by the upper course of the Mekong, is made up of kingdoms and principalities, formed for the most part out of the same territory which surrounds a town, always at loggerheads with one another, absorbed one after the other by the strongest States, and only maintaining their independence in the interval through the rivalry of their powerful neighbours. Paying tribute first to the one side and then to the other, sometimes

to both at once, these Laos States have often been as reasonably considered Burmese as Annamite, or later on, as Siamese. At war with Annam now and again, the Laotians of this region conquered Tonquin eight centuries ago, but it is, none the less, with the Court of Hué that Luang Prabang preserves the closest ties. The chronicles of the town, which have been very conscientiously kept and which were saved from the flames by M. Pavie, testify in many passages to this state of dependency; and among these annals may be found the narrative of an invasion of Annamite troops in the seventeenth century which led to the suicide of the sovereign of Luang Prabang.[1] At a more recent date eye-witnesses have related the expedition of Deo Van Tri referred to in a previous chapter, the Laï chief assuming his right to treat with the king upon behalf of the Emperor of Annam.

Without seeking to undertake an historical work, which would carry us too far, we have only to glance over some of the old maps to find the justification for that phrase of Garnier's which should have been the groundwork of our policy in this region. "What we had to do was to make the king of Luang Prabang feel that a day might come when we should take up the rights exercised over his principality by the Court of Hué, which has now become once more our vassal.[1] Unfortunately, the Siamese, whose influence had extended, after 1838 [2] towards Luang Prabang, came and

[1] The legend has it that the king, when on the point of being made prisoner, had himself attached to the trunk of an elephant and the animal taken down into the river. A pagoda was erected in memory of the drowned ruler.

[2] According to Hallett (*A Thousand Miles on an Elephant*, p. 201), the Shan States of Vienchang and of Luang Prabang

established themselves there for good a few years ago, when they learnt that the French were approaching from the direction of Tonquin. I have already related, when speaking of Deo Van Tri, the ambush set for his brothers, the Siamese officers being accompanied by an Englishman, one McCarthy, who, with another of his compatriots, had been appointed agent at Luang Prabang. I have also referred to the meeting of French and Siamese troops in the plain of Theng, and the retreat of the latter. We were not able to push on any further, for the aged king of Luang Prabang, who

became tributary to Siam. The Siamese authority in the Shan States consisted in arranging their external affairs and sanctioning the nomination of their chiefs. In return for the protection of Siam against the foreign invaders, three States consented to send a triennial tribute, consisting of gold and silver boxes. chased cellarettes and salt-cellars, as well as gold and silver trees worth from fifteen to thirty-five pounds each. To these statements of Hallett as to the early date at which Luang Prabang became tributary to Siam, I would rejoin that the chronicles of Luang Prabang, which have been consulted by M. Pavie, do not contain any allusions to Siam at an earlier period than the last half-century. The Laï chronicle, to which I referred above when dealing with Deo Van Tri, only alluded to the state of dependency in which the King of Luang Prabang stood with regard to Annam.

M. Deschanel would seem to have anticipated the views suggested, if not openly expressed by Hallett, Colquhoun and Lord Lamington, when he wrote in 1885: "The day that England seizes Burmah, our authority in the eastern part of the Indo-Chinese peninsula will receive a severe shock. If we do not take our precautions (in the Upper Laos), the English, once established at Xieng Maï (in Siamese Laos) will be masters, morally speaking, of the valley of the Mekong and the important position of Luang Prabang, which was tributary to Annam. Thus cut off from the great river, in danger of seeing England secure the protectorate of Siam, our situation in Indo-China will be very much weakened." Compare Garnier above.

had at one time hoped to be backed up by our arms, foresaw the policy of non-intervention and excessive prudence which would be impressed upon our officers. He recognised that the valiant champions of our colonial extension would have their hands tied and that it would be no use reckoning upon us. "The Siamese are coming up," he said to Dr. Neis; "we are lost."

As a matter of fact, while we were standing still, the Siamese were advancing, and it is easy to understand the political course followed by the Court of Bangkok; as long as it is left free, it is always marching forward, occupying advance posts, sometimes with only seven or eight militia men, but still making a reality of its occupation. But for Colonel Pennequin, Therg would have fared no better than all the important centres upon the Mekong as far as Cambodia and than several towns between the coast and the river; one can feel that these Siamese troops, when they are on the march, have behind them the moral if not the effective support of intelligent and fearless persons, who are used to getting their way by firm speaking, the only obstacles which they are likely to encounter from European nations being idle diplomatic protests.

As soon as they have established themselves anywhere, the Siamese at once endeavour to combat rival influences, winning over allies underhand and terrorizing those who, seeing no other chance of succour, are compelled to accept their friendship. In 1872 they entered upon the district of Traninh and depopulated part of it, while from Luang Prabang they sent agents on to our territory in the region of

Son La. They also took natives who were under our protection from Song Ma and made them march thirty days to drink in secret "the water of the oath" at a pagoda outside the town, and they are now eager to seize the rich table-lands of the Ponôn. Thus in 1891 ten Annamite chiefs who had been sent into this region by the French Resident at Vinh, with interpreters in our service, were, against the faith of treaties, arrested and sent to Bangkok by order of the Siamese colonel commanding at Luang Prabang, the interpreters beaten, and our flag torn to rags. Only a few days ago an officer put up a proclamation in the town threatening with death all friends of the French, and, in order to obtain reparation for this insult M. Massie was obliged to make a personal business of it and talk of calling the colonel out. So much for the influence possessed by our agents!

The young chiefs, powerless to maintain their autonomy, prefer making a complete surrender to their new masters; and I recently learned that the king had sent for Thais from Theng, that is to say our subjects,[1] who had been transported to the confines of Luang Prabang, and had promised to pay them for cultivating the soil, if they would undertake not to quit his kingdom; because Siam may succeed in extending its power and spoliating its neighbours, we must not conclude that it is in good odour with its neighbours—very much the contrary.

[1] It is said that there were from four to five thousand of them. We might take their interests in hand and, following the tactics adopted by England and Russia, form a nucleus of *protégés*, the defence of whom would invest our agent with a very valid motive for appealing to the local authorities.

In this district, for instance, the king had perhaps formerly less authority; the villages were subject to him by the ties of vassaldom, and, being impelled by a community of interests, formed a federation round the town as a common centre; and Luang Prabang provided a body of militia but did not find any forced labour.

Now, we find that a people is being formed; if there is not a sentiment of nationality the governing power is becoming autocratic and an administrative centralization is being effected to its profit, under the control and the direction of the Siamese. The local rulers are in communication with Bangkok, even if they have not been on a visit there; they are learning to appreciate luxury, and they are upon the point of arming their troops with European weapons, of increasing their effective, and lending aid to the forces of the invaders. In order to obtain these charming results of what may be called "the new civilisation," much money is needed, but if the king's expenditure has increased it has not been so with the earnings of the people. The latter were not consulted when a tax was put upon opium "for their good," when the tchoum-tchoum was made a monopoly, or when a capitation tax of eight rupees for each man and six for each woman was imposed. The consequence is that they are discontented and unable to make any further payments, mandarins from all parts of the kingdom writing that the villagers are willing enough to come to the capital and take the oath, but empty-handed. Last year several had to sell what they possessed, and now they are endeavouring to borrow, and are murmuring

against those who have ruined them. The peasants bow the head in subjection because they see no liberator; but the first man who comes forward with some arms and a relatively small sum of money, in order to drive out the Siamese, may be assured of encountering an enthusiastic and almost unanimous welcome from the population.

What a grand opportunity for us to come forward as protectors of the rights of Annam, and as champions of freedom! Many travellers and ardent colonists have appreciated this, and it is unnecessary for me to recur to the efforts of all the explorers who have traversed these regions, from the time of the Lagréné Mission to that of M. Pavie, including those of Harmand, Neis, Taupin, etc., or to speak of the encouragements given by M. le Myre de Vilers, who created the Vice-Consulate at Luang Prabang or of the warnings of Monseigneur Pugenier as to the intrigues of Siam upon the banks of the Mekong. I should have at the same time to dwell upon the divergent directions of our external policy in the Far East and upon the humiliating and fatal motto imposed upon our representatives, "Don't let us have any bother (*pas d'affaires*)."

I should have to point, on the one hand, in Indo China, to intelligent, courageous and persistent individual efforts, encouraged in some cases by personages of mark, and, upon the other hand, to the timidity, the prudence, not to say the careless or even ignorant apathy of the Foreign Office in Paris.

Were it not for my desire to avoid wearying my readers, I would quote at greater length from M. Garnier, whose conclusions, after a lapse of twenty

years, are still so generally true, but I will content myself with the few lines which follow, taken from the very last page of his book :—

"Unfortunately, we have hitherto subordinated our policy to that of England, and our diplomatists, accustomed to making light of interests so far away, have sacrificed them to the requirements of the cordial understanding between the two countries. But these sacrifices have not been repaid, for the more we have effaced our policy in favour of that approved by our neighbours, the less have they taken us into account. In future, we ought to follow a precisely opposite line of conduct."

To revert to Luang Prabang, we have a Vice-Consul there, or rather an agent, for he has not got an *exequatur*. Assisted by twelve interpreters, he does wonders with the limited means at his disposal, but as he is generally short of money and is obliged to borrow from the Chinese to pay the staff, he cannot do much to uphold French interests. The most he can do is to keep up the few friends whom he has gained for us by his personal influence and winning ways. For his title of French agent weighs as nothing in the balance compared to his personal popularity, so that he is seconded but not feared, for it is known that he cannot speak out, that his threats will remain a dead letter, that he is not backed up, and that the Foreign Office seems indifferent to the Mekong question. Compare our mode of action to that of the English in Xieng Maï, a Laos State bordering on Burmah and similarly situated to Luang Prabang. At Xieng Maï there is a Consul with an *exequatur*, that is to say duly recognized by the native Government and his own, well

paid and backed up by his superiors, having under his own orders several thousand British *protégés* and holding very much the same position as the Siamese Commissioner here, this latter being everything while we are nothing.

The native Government acts under the control of the Commissioner. At the head of it are two kings, one for peace and the other for war, who reign in concert. The royalty is hereditary, and, owing to the existence of polygamy, the royal family is a numerous one and is related to all the families in the city. The two reigning kings [1] bear the names of Chao Kham Souck and Chao Boune Khong (now called by the Siamese Chao Ratchapha Khinai). Their father Chao Boune Kham, after a reign of twenty years, abdicated, and he has now become, at the age of eighty-two, a sacred personage and more or less of a demi-god. Below the throne are five ministers.

| | |
|---|---|
| First Minister . . . . | Phya Muong Sène. |
| Second Minister . . . | Phya Muong Chane. |
| Third Minister . . . . | Phya Maha Sena. |
| Fourth Minister . . . | Phya Muong Koua. |
| Fifth Minister . . . . | Phya Muong Saï. |

They are appointed by the kings, and there is an hereditary assembly called the Sena, to which the members of certain families belong. The king can create new members, but cannot remove any, and the

[1] According to Hallett (p. 32), the kings of Luang Prabang, like those of Lahon, Lapoon, Peh, and Tern, have only the title of Chao Huang (great prince), while those of Xieng Maï and Nan are Chou Che Wit (lord of life). The former are only entitled to kill criminals by piercing their breasts with a lance, while the latter are said to have the right to behead them.

Sena is a sort of House of Peers possessing the right of remonstrance. In fact, the Governmental acts bear the preamble, "The Sena and the King," the former being given precedence.

The administrative functionaries and the judges are appointed by the king, subject to the approval of the Siamese Commissioner. Justice is administered according to the traditions of what was known in the early ages as "the judgments of God." That is to say the oath is taken upon a silver cup or a sword, and holy water is given the accused to drink, and if the accused person has wrongly declared himself innocent the water will poison him or the sword will be thrust through him by a spirit, at night. It need hardly be said that the judges are not satisfied with this test, that is to say, they take care to inform themselves before the trial as to the fortune of the prisoner, and it is said that they are easily influenced by bribes.

The punishments comprise fines, the bastonade, penal servitude, and being put in chains, but torture is not practised. In addition to the forced labour, there is, as already stated, the capitation tax, the opium tax, and the monopoly of the tchoum-tchoum, but the monopoly of gaming, which is the source of large revenue in Siam itself, has been suppressed here by the Siamese as being immoral. It is the same with the speculation upon the money exchange, which is not yet resorted to in Luang Prabang. In the valley of Ménam, more especially, the money in use is composed of earthenware counters, the circulation of which is suspended or the value altered by a Government decree, large profits being thus secured

for the treasury of Luang Prabang is the produce of the customs, there being a tax of three per cent. upon the merchandise and of a basket of salt upon each canoe which comes up from the south with a load of it.

The Laos army is kept up at a very slight cost, there being only, apart from the Siam troops, a royal corps, dressed in European style and armed with rapid-firing rifles. The rest of the men are supplied in the event of war, by the villages with their own form of weapon, and they are not likely to be dangerous opponents for a long time to come, as shown by the way in which they fled before the soldiers of Deo Van Tri.

The territory is not extensive; and although the frontiers are in many places not at all clearly defined, they may be stated approximately as follows: to the east the State of Luang Prabang begins, when descending the Nam-Ou, three or four days before the confluence of that stream with the Mekong, while it is a three days' journey down the latter southward to the frontier and twice as far northward before reaching the confines of Xieng Maï. To the westward, the frontier is not so far, being more or less nearly formed by the watershed of the Mekong and of the Menam, upon the borders of the principality of Nan. If measured by distance on the map, I think that one would not be far out were one to represent the kingdom of Luang Prabang as a square of about seventy-five miles.

The population of the town itself, estimated by Macleod in 1836 at 5,000, by Pallegoin at 80,000, by Monhot at 7,000 or 8,000 and by Garnier at 15,000, strikes me as being nearest to the last mentioned total. My reasons for thinking so are as follows.

From the summit of the hill which overlooks the town I mentally divided it into twelve or fourteen squares of about the same area, and in one of these squares I counted 110 houses. Allowing eight inhabitants to each house, we should have a total of 12,000, and this cannot be far from the truth, for the Siamese Colonel's list of taxpayers makes the total about 11,000.

With regard to the total population of the State, Macleod's estimate was only 50,000, but Garnier puts it at treble, and this is not, I fancy, much off the mark.

The inhabitants are Kas, Laotians, Lus and Meos, while there are also a few Chinese traders and shopkeepers. The Kas, divided into seven tribes, according to the information obtained by Holt, Hallett and Neis, are four times more numerous than the Laotians.

For the most part of small stature,[1] the Kas are very dark in complexion and of the same colour all over the body. Their legs are as a rule thin and their stomachs protuberant; the nose broad and flat; the eyes rather elongated; the lips thick and the jaw prominent, while the forehead is narrow and receding. The facial angle seems to indicate that they belong to an inferior race, and, as a matter of fact, they look like savages by the side of the Laotians. These Kas have long, straight hair falling over the forehead, in some cases tied together by a strip of cloth, or else plastered on the top of the head and fastened at the back in a chignon. The men wear a large ring in the lobe of the ear and fill up the interstice with a piece of wood,

[1] Those whom we measured averaged about five feet two inches; the women being smaller.



KHAMOUKS, (FULL AND SIDE FACE), LUANG PRABANG.

or a bunch of flowers. Their dress, as a rule, consists only of a sheet, that is to say of a piece of blue cloth passing between the legs and fastened round the waist, the women wearing a turban, a loose vest, and a short petticoat. The Kas of Luang Prabang appear to be very shy, and I could not induce them, even by the promise of presents, to let me photograph them, the only means by which I succeeded being an order from the Siamese Colonel, while, when brought up, they were so intimidated that I could count their pulses beating at more than eighty to the minute. When walking in the streets they proceed as if they were afraid that some one was going to hurt them, and, being more laborious if less educated than the Laotians, they are employed by the latter to fashion the metals, to look after the stock and to cultivate the soil, so that they fill much the same part that the Lacædemonians of old did, except that they are not so badly used.

In former times the men of the conquering race made inroads into the Kas villages and carried off a number of the inhabitants as slaves, the males being seized in preference to the females, while with the people of the plain the reverse was the case. Now the king has abolished slavery in theory, though in reality it still exists;[1] but the armed raids are not of frequent occurrence. Here, as is the case with certain European nations upon the coast of Africa, who claim

[1] Slavery as practised upon the Kas is regarded as legal among the Laotians; a father who is poor and has a large family, often sells one or two of his sons, at the rate of fifteen rupees if they are very young, and of from twenty to forty for adults. They are then employed as boatmen.

to be fighting the battle of liberty, the term forced labour is substituted for slavery, because it sounds better. I do not wish to criticise the generous sentiments which humanitarian ideas have evoked against slavery, but I am inclined to ask myself whether, taking everything into account, this condition is not often preferable for the people of the inferior races to liberty without the means of livelihood.

I was talking with a young slave who had been purchased by the mother-in-law of one of our interpreters, and he did not seem at all desirous of being freed. His parents, too poor to support him, had sold him, he was well-fed and happy with his masters, and asked for nothing better.

Compared to the Kas, the Laotians, as I have said, represent the dominant race. Taller than the former, and of a lighter complexion, the men have not in the shoulders and chest the purity of lines which one sees in the savages, and they generally go about bare-headed, with their hair cut close and clothed only in a tunic. The women wear merely a small petticoat, though some of them have a scarf of red or yellow silk over their breasts. Their bust is, as a rule, of good shape, and their hair, combed back, is worn in a small chignon. Despite their slightly flattened nose and the size of their mouth, some of the young girls strike one as pretty, but, as is always the case in the south and in the east, they soon show signs of age. They are very fond of jewellery, and generally wear earrings in the shape of a long nail of red gold, and bracelets of the same material.

The Laotians of Luang Prabang, in their way of speaking and general demeanour, give me the idea of

what the citizens of a small Greek republic might have been like, and I can fancy the Athenians, putting the æsthetic sentiment upon one side, to have been of a like disposition, lazy, fond of gossip, and of an easy saunter, devoted to flowers, women, and music.

The men do but little work, labour in the mines and the cultivation of the soil being left to the Kas, and it is only in the towns that they are found engaging in any artistic occupation, such as the making of jewellery or the chasing of silver. Even those who do work rarely do so for more than seven hours a day, and the woman keep the pot boiling by spinning silk and making various materials, though they do not overwork themselves. When a household is very hard pressed the men seek employment as boatmen, and are very expert, making enough in a month or two to keep them the rest of the year, so that if there are few large fortunes, most of the inhabitants have enough to live upon in comfort, preferring freedom and tranquillity to an excess of labour, which would only give them what they do not want. Moreover, when they do happen to have put by a decent sum of money, they go and spend it at the pagoda, either in fulfilment of a vow or in payment of some religious ceremony. This is their only luxury, nor, indeed, do they regard it as one, for they reckon upon profiting by it in another world.

There would be but a poor opening for labour here, as what work has to be done is paid for in kind, one family helping another. Thus, for instance, let us suppose that a certain family wants to build a house. Having gradually got together all the necessary materials, it calls its neighbours together, and the

whole work is completed in a single day, the house-warming taking place the same evening, and all who have shared in the work joining in it.

It may be asked how do the Laotians spend their time if they are lazy and have scarcely any occupation ? The answer is easy—the greater part of their days and nights being employed in paying court to the young ladies and in services at the pagoda.

Formerly there was a law dispensing the young men from military service and taxation upon the ground that their first duty was towards the young women, and although this law is repealed *de jure*, it still serves as a rule of conduct and reveals the spirit of this people.

The men gossip with the girls, give them flowers, play to them, recite verses, sing them songs and play at cards with them, but never dance with them. Men and women walk through the streets singing, in groups where the two sexes are apart, or sit opposite the one to the other at the entrance to the pagodas. I shall have an opportunity of recurring to these peculiar love-makings, and I have noticed that, in contradistinction to what generally takes place in the East, here it is the young women who dominate the men, who go through the form of beating them, if necessary, and who condescend to cast an amorous glance at them or to respond to their compliments.

Some of these flirtations are durable, for a young man who has paid court for a long time to a girl generally ends by making her his mistress, but this is not looked upon as at all dishonourable, for there are a great many unmarried women mothers, and [illegible] of them are held in as much respect as those




A LAOS FLOWER GIRL, LUANG PRABANG.

that are married, while marriage often follows the birth of a child. Moreover, if the girl informs her parents and reveals the name of her lover, the latter is bound to pay a fine of about fifteen rupees, or to marry her. All assaults upon women are taxed at varying rates, there being different fines for a kiss upon the mouth or upon the arm, and for rape. Adultery with a married woman, which is of very rare occurrence, entails a fine of 200 rupees; but, after having been very gay in their youth, husband and wife generally settle down quietly, the former often taking it out of his wife for her unceremonious treatment of him beforehand. I happened, while walking about the town one morning, to witness one of these little family scenes. A woman was shrieking and crying because her husband had been beating her, and when I came to question the pair, the man complained that his wife, who had been out to market, had not returned by nine o'clock to get his breakfast ready, so she must have stopped to gossip on the way. Her answer was that she had not heard the gong strike the hour, that she had not stopped on the way home, and that there was no reason why she should have had a beating. The quarrel was eventually made up without having recourse to a divorce, which, though legally recognised, is rarely resorted to.

The code of morals, it will be seen, is a rather loose one, but this does not prevent the affection of the parents for their children from being very strongly developed. I have rarely seen children made so much of or so closely looked after as they are here.

It is not every man, indiscriminately, who is allowed

excluded, viz., that of the bonzes and the aspirants to that order. The creed is Buddhism, very much the same as in Burmah and Siam. Apart from a few free-thinkers, who are regarded as brands plucked for the burning, the people are religious, that is to say they flock to the pagodas for certain festivals, bring presents, and provide liberally for the bonzes. Luang Prabang and its suburbs have about eighty pagodas, distributed over four parishes, at the head of each being a bishop, who is to be distinguished from the other priests by a short skirt of violet-coloured silk. The ordinary priests are invariably attired in yellow, with a long skirt and with drapery thrown back over the shoulder like the Lamas of Thibet, while they all have shaved heads. The hierarchy is as follows, to begin from the bottom :—

The *Tiona* (brethren) : these are the aspirant priests or students ; in many cases sent to the pagoda by their family for a brief stage.

The *Tiammone* (priests) : these have already taken the vow of celibacy.

The *Satouks*, or venerables.

The *Satouk Kron*, or venerable masters. A priest becomes *Satouk* by popular election, and the people consecrate their choice by pouring the water of purification over the priest whom they have chosen.

The king alone names the *Satouk Kron*, who are appointed by his pouring "royal water" over them during one of the great festivals when the idols are being washed.

All the members of the religious corporation reside in the buildings near the pagodas, and they comprise

body is constantly shifting. Moreover, women dressed in white, generally old maids or widows, also have their heads shaved and become female priests, their special duty being to make the collections at the pagodas.

The signal for the commencement of the principal acts of worship is a big bell placed upon the summit of the hill, and it is also used as an alarm bell in the event of fire, in which case it is rung in quite a different way.

The bonzes give instruction to their pupils, preside over certain festivals and preach to the people: they read passages from the sacred books, inculcate charity, and above all impress upon their congregations the importance of making many presents to the pagoda so as to be well pleasing to heaven and to deserve everlasting life.

In a small chapel, in front of each pagoda, a bronze bell rings every afternoon at four o'clock, while on Sundays and fête days it rings at 1 A.M. The bonzes, be it added, are supposed to make only two meals a day, in the early morning and at noon, but their pupils are not expected to conform to this rule.

From the second grade the priest is supposed to be a celibate, but the rule is sometimes disregarded, and it is no uncommon thing for a priest of loose habits to change his dres at dusk and go out to amuse himself. If his superiors catch him, he and his accomplice are sentenced to some such severe labour as supplying bricks for the pagoda, while in Cambodia they are more severe, the pagoda itself being closed.

These vows are not necessarily perpetual, and if a

his superior can release him from them upon the request of his relatives and after the performance of certain formalities. This, however, is a rare occurrence. The great development of the Buddhist creed does not prevent superstitions of another order from being prevalent among the multitude, superstitions the trace of which is easily followed at the great festivals that always appertain to ancient traditions or to the dread of evil spirits. Diseases are regarded in the light of persons, and when the cholera made its appearance here last year, one of the mandarins went round the town at the head of a squad of soldiers who executed discharges of musketry at the gates to drive away the enemy. But the native chief was not rewarded for his zeal, as two days after, as the story goes, the cholera appeared to him in a dream and reproached him for trying to drive it away, saying that in coming to Luang Prabang it was simply doing its duty. As a punishment for his conduct, the cholera announced to him his approaching death, and when the mandarin woke up he was so terrified by the dream that he fell ill and died three days afterwards.

In addition to the respect felt for spirits, it would seem as if the worship of nature and its forces is still preserved, for honour is paid to the moon, the women going about the streets shouting at each change of quarter. Guns and salvoes are also fired during the eclipses, at which periods the people say that "the moon is eaten up," without seeking for any other explanation of the phenomenon.

The truth is that they have not much learning,

which they have received ; but upon the other hand they know their country well, are fairly familiar with geography, possessing a good idea of distances, and also having a good memory for historical occurrences, while their annals are in good order and are well kept.

In short, I have only to repeat what I said above ; that they are a curious people ; lazy without being fools ; of equal fortune, as a rule, without great wealth or great distress ; of a fairly pacific character ; well disposed towards foreigners without exhibiting the intolerable curiosity of the Chinese ; very religious, more, perhaps, from habit than from strong convictions ; and, what is so rare in the East, treating women and girls with deference. For, while very free in their morals, they have their serenades and their "Courts of Love," reviving in the midst of Indo-China practices which belong rather to the Europe of the Middle Ages. There is something poetical, chivalrous and French, or, to go back to an earlier period, something Athenian in the inhabitants of the Laos ; and if they have not the artistic feeling of the Greek, they have no desire for a knowledge of luxury. Having very little to earn, they do not work much and their existence is more unfettered. From a material point of view a Laotian is happier than the French workman, whose grinding toil contributes to the unlimited enjoyment of the few, and whose individuality is swallowed up in the mechanism of some vast industrial enterprise.

With regard to the future of the Laotian race, it may be foretold with certainty that it is fated to have the same lot which it has itself meted out to the less

intelligent Kas ; it will be conquered or subjected by some superior race. But the question will then arise whether it will have the force of character to lead a life of servitude, working like the negritos whom it has itself subjected ; or whether it will fuse with its conquerors, or gradually disappear.

In speaking of the inhabitants of the principality of Luang Prabang, I referred to the Lus, the Meos and the Chinese, and a few words must be said about all three.

The first mentioned strike me as being, from an ethnographical point of view, very similar to the Laotians, whose language they speak, with a few slight differences of dialect, but they are smaller, punier and in a more poverty-stricken state. We saw one of their villages, just behind Luang Prabang, and its poverty was the most salient feature about it. Coming originally from Sibsompanas, where they form the principal element of the population, they have been driven south by Chinese wars and invasions, and several of them told me that they had not the means of returning home. Moreover, they are just as well off where they are, for, like the Kas, they cultivate the soil, planting rice fields for the Laotians. Their clothing is very poor compared with that of the latter, the men wearing short blue trousers and the women, striped petticoats, the latter having their hair drawn up in a chignon at the top of the head, covered in many cases with a dark blue scarf, while both sexes wear a loose blue vest.

The Meos live upon the eastern frontier of the kingdom, close to the Pouons plateau. I never met



MÉO OF TRANINH (FULL AND SIDE FACE) AT LUANG PRABANG.



conversing with one who was employed by M. Counillon, the French consul. He was a man of small stature, but well proportioned, with very pale complexion and regular features, and he told me that the Meos originally came from China and could make themselves understood by the caravan-men from the Yunnam. I gathered from his expressions that the Meos dialect is very like that of Van Bou, the word Meos, being rather the Laos designation, while they call themselves *Mongs*. I do not know whether this name has any connection with that of the ancient empire of the *Mongs* and the Möns of Burmah, but, according to the man with whom I conversed, the tribes to which he belongs have no religious creeds, though there is a word in his language which denotes the Deity. The marriages are arranged by the parents, a young girl being rated at 36 rupees and taken, as soon as she is married, to the house of her husband. The bodies of the defunct are interred three days after death.

With regard to the few Chinese, they form a colony apart at Luang Prabang, devoting their energies to the trade in rice, salt and European fancy goods brought from Bangkok, no caravans from the Yunnam coming this far.

Having given these particulars as to the kingdom of Luang Prabang, its limits, its inhabitants, its administration and its future, I must now say something about the town and what we saw there.

During the fortnight of our stay we employed our time in much the same way. We spent the morning and fore part of the day upon the left bank, visiting everything that was to be seen in

as much detail as possible, taking notes and photographs, while later in the afternoon we went out on horseback to the suburbs. In this way, time went all too quickly, as there is so much to be seen here. No sooner had we got back than we were overrun by a troop of female hawkers, who settled themselves down in our quarters and spread out their wares for sale. These women all wear the same sort of dress, namely a silk petticoat with a scarf to match, some of them having their hair cropped close after the Siamese fashion, which is a very ugly one. After a few days we get quite familiar and call these young ladies by their proper names. They either have some name which indicates their sex, followed by the qualification of small, pretty, or what not; or else they bear the name of some good quality, such as peace, happiness, prosperity, jewel. The same saleswomen came back every day, asking an exorbitant price for every article and not showing any inclination to rebate it. However, they are very good-natured in the bargaining which follows, and seem as well pleased if they do not effect a sale as when, after a long discussion, we end by making a purchase. They have a very diversified stock of goods to choose from, including gold embroidered shirts made by the Lus, Siam brocaded vests, old silver, bracelets made of Kas bronze, and hatchets and other weapons in old bronze; these latter are very scarce and difficult to buy, as they are preserved with superstitious reverence by the families to which they belong. The hatchets, some of which are straight while others are curved, are very characteristic, while the ivory-handled knives represent yaks, the genii of the Buddhist religion,

similar to those which are found in the interior of Borneo. Then there are amulets, wild boar tusks, pyrites, and fossils rolled up in thin silver thread, some of these latter being supposed to possess the power of fecundation, while others are obscene.

The industries special to the country are represented by silver work, cups for the temples, tobacco jars, apparatus for crushing the betel nut, and knife handles. These articles are made of gold for personages of very high standing, but only to order.

The scarves which are celebrated in Indo-China, embroidered by hand with a great variety of design, and in very harmonious colours, denote great taste. After the saleswomen have folded their goods and packed them up to take away, some of them lag behind and tell us that they are themselves for sale at twenty-five or thirty rupees.

Then come the bonzes, one of whom, a big, fat man, with a bosom as protuberant as that of a woman, is a very important personage, as his small violet petticoat indicates. Satouk Camdi, as he is called, has a frank, cheerful face and strong voice, which he makes ample use of to ply us with questions. Once settled down, with his porters who carry sunshade, fan, &c., it seems as if we should never get rid of him. My proposal to photograph him is very gleefully accepted, and he at once makes his brother and sister sit for their portraits as well.

At first, we received several visits from an aged bonze, also occupying an important position, who had been for many years friendly to the French. "They are fathers and brothers to me," he would say. During the second half of our visit, he had been

seized with a wasting illness, and we frequently went to see him. One of the interpreters of the Consulate was teaching his pupils French, and they struck me as being very intelligent, while their lessons were well done.

We also made the acquaintance of the Siamese colonel and of the commandant. The former, attired in a small white jacket, blue silk trousers, helmet, stockings and shoes, is a man of considerable intelligence, and very pleasant in his manner. The Prah Pa La Sa Da (abbreviated into Prah Sada), or chief over a thousand, has been decorated by the French Government at the request of M. Pavie, to whom he often refers, and he is of great use to us during our stay, especially in respect to the photography, in which he is himself an expert.

We receive visits from the brothers of the kings who send to say that they will be very pleased to see us, and, in order to reach their residence, we have to cross the river. There is much to note of interest on the way, and many good subjects for a photograph.

We notice, for instance, on the sand-banks near the water, rows of poles, which women, with baskets passed through their arms, come to inspect, and apparently to wipe at frequent intervals. This excites our curiosity, and when we get closer, we find that these poles are done over with glue to catch the grasshoppers which alight upon them, and which are sold in the market as a staple article of food. A good deal of net fishing goes on in the river itself, but it is not till later in the season that the *prabeuc*, a fish resembling the sturgeon, is caught. At fixed




GRASSHOPPER HUNTERS, LUANG PRABANG.

periods, this fish ascends the river as far as the confluent of the Nam Ou, and its capture is a source of great profit for the inhabitants, as its eggs (which make excellent caviar when fresh) are sent as far as Xieng Mai, while the fish itself is canned and isinglass is obtained from its skin.

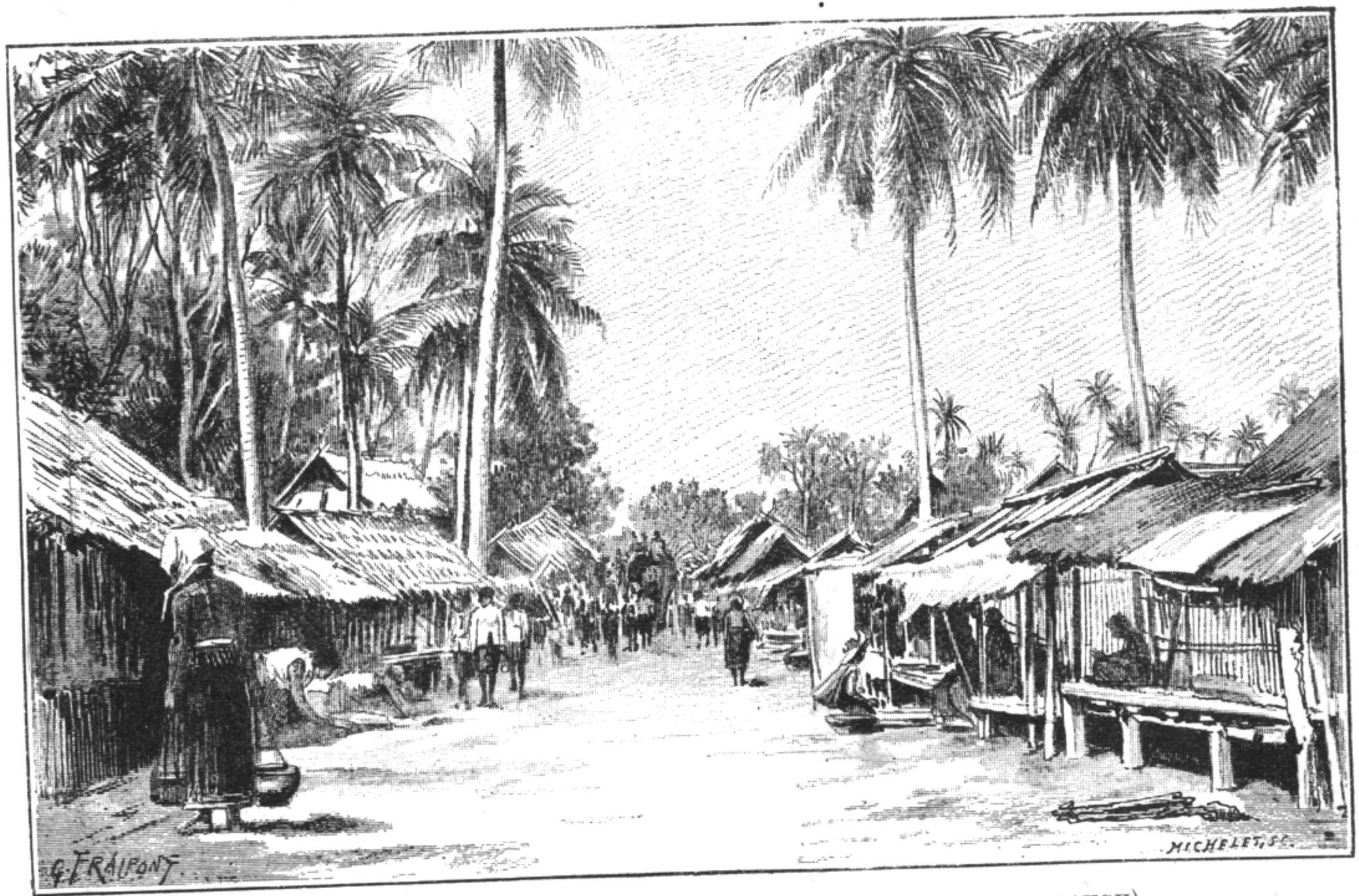
When we land on the left bank, we notice a number of people stooping down, with their feet in the water, engaged in washing out the sand; these are gold finders, who earn but a scanty living, though they sometimes come upon an old coin or two which has been washed down stream. A climb of about fifty feet up decrepit steps, which in summer are under water, brings us to the town. Close upon the left is a small pagoda, Ouate Poune Saï, which is only remarkable for the fresco above the entrance gate, this representing Kop, the sun, eating the moon; in other words, the fresco is intended to designate an eclipse.

In front of us is a broad avenue, lined with fine trees, which is perpendicular to the river, and is intersected at a distance of a hundred yards or so by a road which runs parallel to the Mekong. This is the main street of Luang Prabang, upon the two sides of which the market is held morning and evening. The animation is greatest in the morning, when, for a distance of more than half a mile, there is a long row of small booths, some of which are rather lofty, and are surmounted by a roof of bamboos, while others are very close to the ground. These booths are the rendezvous of the whole population, of the bourgeoisie, of the mountaineers, of the bonzes, of the working classes, and of the villagers. It is a strange crowd,

and among the component parts of it are young girls bare to the waist, with a smile upon their lips, their arms encircled by several gold bracelets, and with a gardenia in their hair, while beside them, perchance looking much more frail and humble, is a Ka woman with a turban upon her head and a basket on her back, fastened by a piece of leather going round her forehead. Then there are groups of Kas, ten or twelve together, who walk about with a timid, startled look, and try to dodge my photographic apparatus. Following these, perhaps, is a convoy of prisoners, wearing black gaiters to avoid the friction of the rings in their chains, behind them being the Siamese soldiers, who have silk trousers, linen vest and felt hat. Their aspect and bearing denote the *parvenu*, and they display all the insolence of new masters, contrasting with the calm, dignified air of the portly bonzes, who, robed in yellow and escorted by their young pupils, proceed with measured and self-satisfied tread.

There is little sign of hurry in the crowd, and it is as much as they can do to move out of the way to let a royal elephant or the vehicle which is conveying a Minister to the Royal Council Chamber go by.

The shops and booths contain the various products of the country, such as articles of food, strong condiments, rice cakes, jam, and all that is required to make the quids of betel-nut, barks of red wood, native shirts, scarves, flowers for the pagodas, earthenware pans, iron implements, small pigs of lead (from Ban Lathane, one or two days' sail up the Mekong), and a variety of other local goods. In addition to these, there are the articles imported either




THE MARKET STREET AT LUANG PRABANG (ELEPHANTS PASSING THROUGH).

from the North or the South. From China come opium, musk, tea, vermicelli, and the felt carpets with a white pattern which are brought from Tali, and which I had seen before when travelling in Thibet; from Burmah green and red boxes of lacker work such as one sees in India; from Bangkok and Xieng Maï European shoddy goods, muslins and stuffs, red silks with the mark, "Manufactured in Lyons, France," with calicoes sold for about sixpence a yard, imitation jewellery, sleeve links, garters, thread, needles, Japanese matches (sold for fourpence or fivepence per ten boxes), scribbling paper, condensed milk and a host of other articles, all either of English or of German make, the only French articles which I came across are a few bottles of ink and buttons.

As said before, it is the Chinese who import and sell the goods from Siam or the Western Shan States, there being four traders in European articles. One of these is a French *protégé*, who tells me that he has brought his stock of goods from Bangkok by Pitchaï. When he goes down, he takes with him from Luang Prabang ivory, for which he pays about 5*s*. a pound, and benzoin which costs him about a rupee per lb. Last year, the price of these articles was very nearly double, and the trader tells me that a pair of fine stag's horns is worth about thirty rupees, a smaller pair fetching a third of that price. He adds that business is very bad, and that it is as much as he can do to make both ends meet.

The money in circulation is the English rupee, the Siamese tical, the piastre, native coins in copper and silver, shaped like canoes, and cowries strung together like chaplets, these latter coming by way of Burmah

or Siam from the Gulf of Bengal. I am told a curious story about one piece of money formerly coined in the Principality of Nan; the legend is that a queen who formerly ruled over the country, was so ugly that she could not find any one to fall in love with her, and that, in order to show that, however beautiful their features may be, all women are alike, she had a certain part of her body represented on this coin.

In the market, each vendor has his own special stall, while the representatives of the same trade are all placed together, and a tax of twenty-five cowries is collected from each of them every morning by soldiers told off for the purpose, whereas the street hawkers are exempted from all dues. The market occupies the principal artery of the town, with numerous pagodas and palaces to the right and left, one of those on the left being Ouate Maï, *ouate* being the word used in Laotian, Siamese, and Burmese, to signify temple, while *maï* means new. The pagoda itself is from 100 to 130 feet long by fifty to seventy feet broad, with whitewashed walls and a tile roof. The interior is very similar to that of a Catholic church, with pictures on the walls representing religious legends, and at the end an altar, upon which are accumulated ornaments of all kinds and statues of gods in every variety of pose, while in the centre, as in all the other temples, is a golden figure of Buddha seated, from seven to ten feet high. The features are the same in all these statues of Buddha, and, with his legs crossed, and his hands resting upon his thigh, the statue which is more the outcome of high strung religious feelings, and

succeeded one another upon this soil for so many centuries, than the work of any great artist, seems to have concentrated in its attitude, its countenance, and its gaze, the essence of the moral beliefs, the object of existence, and the reason of death, as they were conceived by one-half of the old world. The foreign traveller who seats himself upon the floor of a pagoda, and keeps his eyes steadily fixed for some time upon the principal idol, must mentally be so far hypnotised by it as to feel springing up in him ideas of charity, of detachment from worldly things, of self-contemplation, of resignation to the inevitable, and of being absorbed in the vast whole reflected by Buddha.

With the exception of the principal statue, the gods are not seated, and in this pagoda of Ouate Maï, the divinity held in the greatest veneration is one with outstretched hands as if in the act of giving the benediction. This is the Prabang or "Buddha of the gold washings," as he is made out of the gold found in the district. Tradition has it that this deity was brought here by the Laotians, when they emigrated from Muong-Theng, and that, after being carried off to Bangkok by the Siamese, it was brought back to Luang Prabang about twenty years ago. Another legend is that the statue was sent about 200 years ago by the king of Cambodia; but in any case it has given its name to the town, and it is covered with embroideries and chasubles, and placed in the recess of a reliquary to which diverse ornaments are suspended. In front of this is a movable bronze grating, ending in two dragons with intertwined tails, called *Nâk*, while to the left of the altar is a pulpit very similar to a sedan chair, from which the bonzes

give their lessons and recite their prayers. The temples are public, and they who have no family home are entitled to sleep in them, while upon week days the people come to make offerings of flowers, and perform libations with water, listening to the advice given them by the priests, while the women tell their beads, and signify that they have got through them by blowing through a sea shell.

Outside the principal building, in the courtyard of the pagoda, are a series of *ongmong*, or small buildings which contain the statues of the gods ; pyramids (T'âte) containing the bones of prominent bonzes or members of the Royal Family, and plaster bells like the lotus flower, behind all these buildings, hidden among the trees, being the houses of the bonzes, whose pupils we remark at play, the game at which they play, with a hollow ball made out of bamboo canes twisted together, being one which requires great skill.

After leaving Ouate Maï, we ascend the small hill which commands a fine view of the town, about 350 feet above, and upon the summit of which are several small buildings and a gilt belfry in which is hung a tam tam about three feet in length. Several men keep guard over it and beat it to let the bonzes know when it is the hour for study, or else an alarm bell in case of fire. There is a grand view from here, as the city is at our feet, half hidden among the cocoa-trees, one part, which was burnt last year and has been rebuilt, being less wooded than the others.

We collect some bivalve fossils as we come down, half-way from the summit, being a covered terrace with a building, inside which is a bath-shaped

by the foot of Buddha when he traversed the Mekong. This is why it is called Pra *bate*[1] (foot of God).

Above the market and built against the hill is the residence of one of the four leading bonzes from whom we had a visit yesterday; and upon going to see him there we find that the interior is ornamented with coloured designs and pictures, given him by Frenchmen, of the Eiffel Tower and so forth, with a small chapel in one corner and a library of religious books, many of which are rolled up in palm leaves. The only curious object in the adjoining pagoda is a wooden statue of Buddha (Pasine), in a crouching attitude, like that of a monkey when scratching his chin. The skull is very depressed and misshapen; and it is possible that those who offered the image were desirous of depicting the incident in his life, when having complained to God of the temptation which the flesh evoked in him, he received by way of reply a violent blow on the head in order to crush his carnal appetites.

Among the other pagodas are Ouate Tiomsi, which contains nothing remarkable, and Ouate Pahope, with a good deal of wood carving and frescoes representing animals and scenes in the life of Buddha, to say nothing of pictures of Frenchwomen in the dress of the First Empire, which may possibly have been brought here by the traveller Monhot some forty years ago. Beyond these are Ouate Paphay and Ouate Pakay, both of which are very graceful and have beautifully carved façades. The whole effect reminds me in a remote measure of the Hindoo architecture, and among the figures on the wood-carving of the doors is

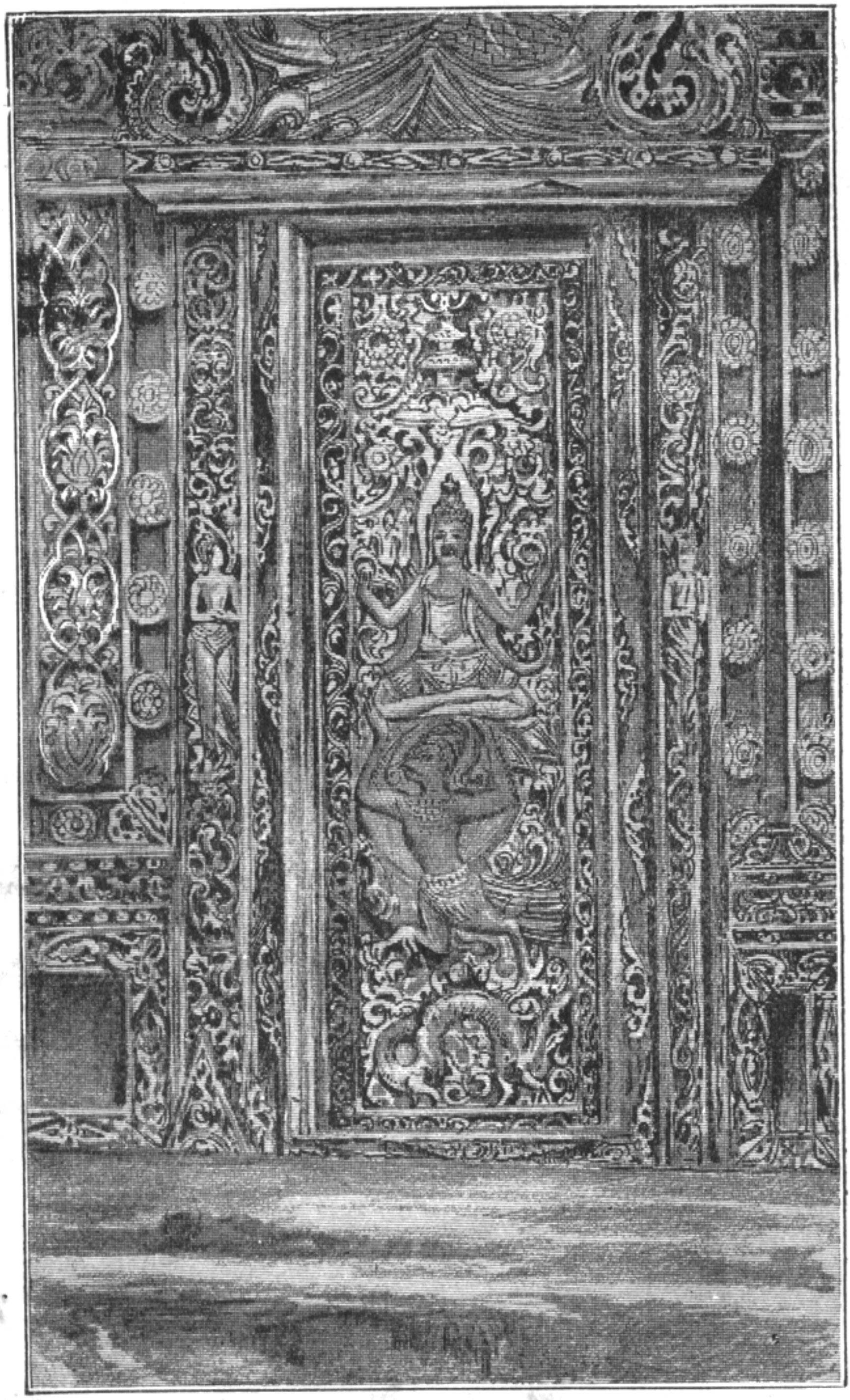
[1] *Bate* is the word used for the feet of deities or kings; *tine* for those of ordinary mortals.

one of Nangmanouba, a woman standing up on a dragon, and another of a personage wearing a costume very similar to that which was in vogue with us during the middle ages.

The same subject is to be seen, let me add, in the pagoda of Benom, and in a fresco at Xienhoung. Inside one of these two pagodas is a series of frescoes and pictures, eighteen of these latter representing the popular history, revealed in nearly all the pagodas of the king Pra Metsandaha, who, out of charity, gives away his chariot, his horses, his wife and his children, and who is, in the end, driven out of his kingdom.

To the left of the market there is a small plain, with a few pools and the remains of an unfinished pagoda, while nearer the Mekong is the Ouate Sieng Muong and then the royal palace, fenced in by a rectangular palisade of bamboo. The guard is formed of about forty Laotians dressed in yellow canvas and armed with European weapons, and their guard-house, with sentinel boxes on each side of the gates, is about in the centre. The palace consists of three buildings; that in the centre, which is of brick, and will, when finished, have two storeys, being the new palace, while to the right a white house with green blinds is the residence of the old king, his son, who now holds the reins of government, living to the left in what looks very much like a Swiss *chalet* of yellow wood. We commence our visit by the last named, the Siamese Colonel coming to meet us on the steps,[1] while the king is waiting

[1] It is worthy of note that at Xieng Maï, the native prince receives the English direct, without the intermediary of the



THE GOD KROUTE. GATE OF OUATE PAKAY, LUANG PRABANG.


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behind him. The latter, attired in a short blue tunic, with a *langouti* of rose-coloured silk, wears shoes and stockings and has his hair cut very short. Although of intelligent bearing, he seems embarrassed by the presence of the colonel, to whom he turns every time he speaks, as much as to ask his leave to open his mouth. In fact, I do not think that I should be doing him an injustice if I said that he gave me the impression of a pupil with his tutor.

Having taken our seats in a circle round a table, upon which stood gold cups containing cigarettes, we have leisure to notice that the room is draped with bamboo mats and lighted by petroleum lamps, while in the recess is a throne in blue and red, shaped very much like a bed and surmounted by a white daïs trimmed with lace. From the wall behind hangs a portrait of his father done at Bangkok.

Upon a sign from the king, tea and cigarettes are brought us, and the servants fan us. The other servants, who are dressed like the common people, remain in a crouching attitude, and if they move about the room do so on their hands and knees. It is humiliating to see men dragging themselves about like animals; but we do not witness the sight long as our visit is a brief one, and it is not until some time after this that we see the father, a fine old man of eighty-two, whose white hair is cropped close, and whose face is very intelligent, though owing to the loss of his teeth the chin is rather elevated.

His position as a semi-divinity enables him to speak his mind very freely, and he takes great interest in our journey, giving us some advice as to

our descent of the Mekong. He seems very grateful to M. Pavie, who once saved his life, and he makes even more favourable an impression upon us than his son, though both seem well disposed towards the Europeans—if they were free to act. But Siam plays the same part towards them that China does to Thibet, and one would hope that the era of liberty is at hand which, in delivering the two countries from the yoke which oppresses them, will open a valuable field of study to our science and fresh outlets to our commerce.

Between the palace and the river bank a broad street runs parallel to the market, and at frequent intervals are jars containing water, placed there by the inhabitants, who believe that in so doing they are making sure of a reward hereafter.

There are several artisans in this quarter, and we were taken to see a goldsmith, the bellows of whose forge consisted of the trunk of a hollow tree with a piston inside, and he tells us that he had left the king's service because he was so irregularly paid. There are several other pagodas at the far end of the town to be visited, including that of Ouate Sieng Tong, in which we notice a large banner on which are depicted a series of circles representing the march of Buddha. True believers can see upon these banners the footprints of the god, and these figures reproduced upon the coats of the soldiers are regarded as a talisman.

Among the accessory monuments in the courtyard is a small pyramid partly covered with blades of silver or copper and bearing a Laotian inscription, which, as the interpreter tells me, informs passers-by

that the bones of a mandarin named Tianone are laid to rest inside it, and the edifice is surrounded by pillars, surmounted by lotus flowers, and looking very much like large asparagus.

This brings us to the confluent of the Nam Kane, which is not more than 130 feet broad, and is only accessible to canoes of light draught, whereas if there was more water, it could be utilized for the transport of goods as far as Luang Prabang. From Vinh to this latter place, the journey now takes about thirty days and the region situated between the coast of Annam and the Mekong is a very fertile one. This is the plateau of Poûon, which is in the possession of an European climate, the vine, fruit trees, melons and other European plants thriving well there. The country is a very healthy one, and there is a prosperous future before the intelligent colonists who know how to go to work.

Going up the stream as far as the point where the two rivers meet, we came to the movable bridge built upon piles, which leads to the village of Pan Luong and beyond that, quite at the south of the village, the manufactory of tchoum-tchoum. This liquor is obtained by putting water and rice into earthenware jars, and letting it ferment for a fortnight; at the end of that time the contents of the jars are placed, together with a little yeast, into wooden casks surmounted by a large vat full of water. By a somewhat complicated process, the liquor known as tchoum-tchoum is obtained and sold at the rate of two ticals per gallon. This part of the town is very sparsely inhabited, a few ruins on the track indicating the site

of the ancient ramparts, while turning back in the direction of the river, we have on our left the grounds of several houses belonging to mandarins, and on the right, at the foot of the hill, a group of pagodas well worth a visit.

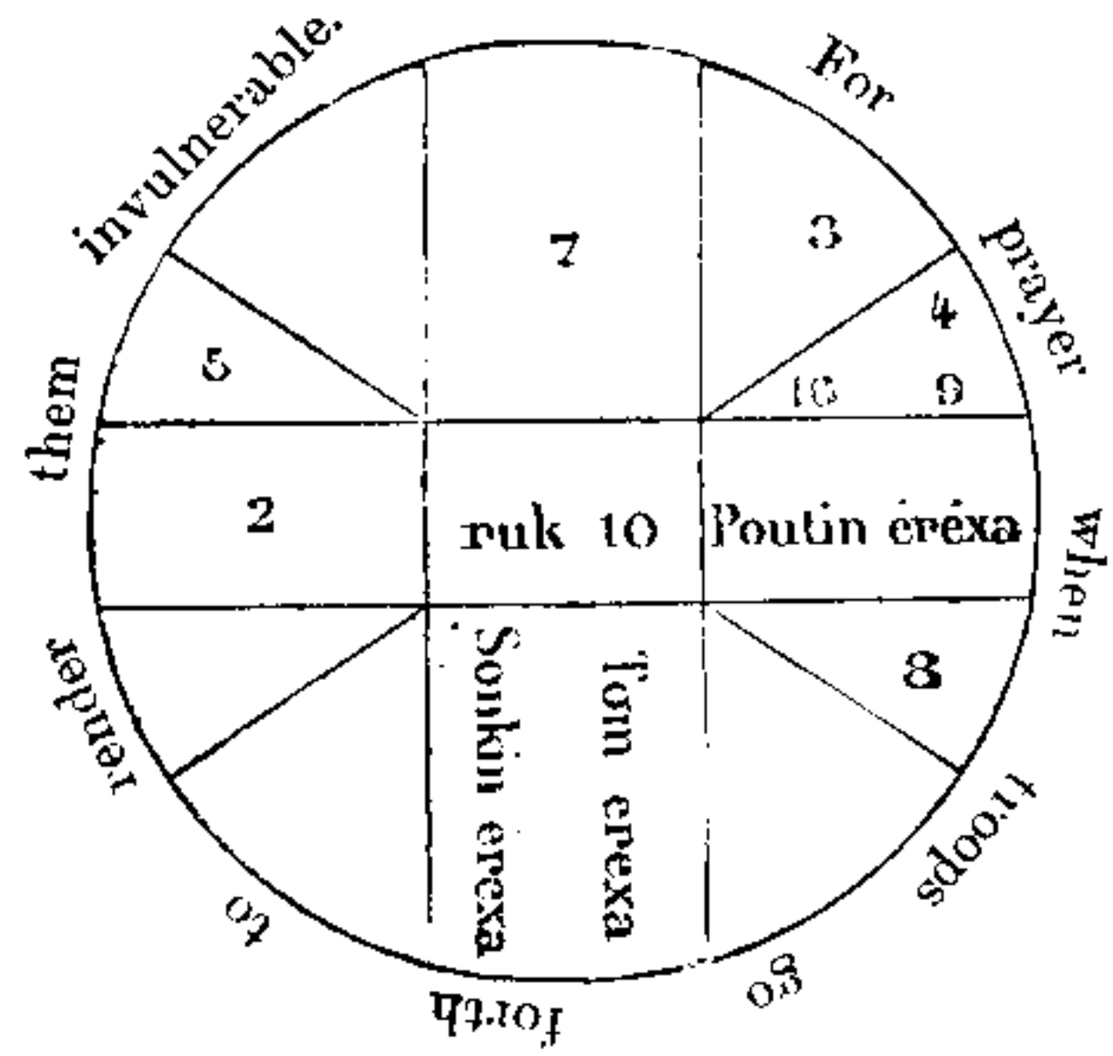
The most important of these is Ouate Uisoune, so named after the king who built it. Dating, as the Siamese Colonel tells us, from the fourteenth century, it is in a very decrepit state, but there is much in it worth seeing; notably the gates which are of carved wood and gilt. To the right is Pra Noriei, the four-armed goddess, borne up by Kroute, the god of the birds, and in the centre are two women, one of whom is being carried by five elephants, while to the left a god standing erect upon a buffalo is supposed to represent the chief of the coolies who weed the court-yards of the pagodas. In the interior are a number of wooden columns covered with gilded designs and others of masonry, together with pictures representing the history of Pra Uetsandaha and of Guadama. Upon the altar is a large gilt statue called Pratiao Ong Luong (great god), and behind the altar is a semi-circular black stone upon a wooden pedestal and covered with Laotian inscriptions. Upon one side of this stone, it is related how the king of Muong Hay (near Muong Yan), having come for a festival with the king of Luang Prabang, left in the pagoda images of Buddha and books made of palm branches about 1198. The date is 1198 after *Tiaoman Ta*, who is supposed to have lived sixty-six centuries ago, so that it is one difficult to verify. Upon the reverse is a cabalistic sign which, worn by a soldier on the



OUATE UISOUNE (PAGODA), LUANG PRABANG.


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breast, renders him invulnerable. This sign is as follows :—




The figures are in Laotian.

*Ruk* is an invocation to the gods.

*Poutin erexa* means (Pra god) *pout*, protect me.

*Tom* (in) *erexa* means (Teonda god) protect me.

*Sonkin erexa* means, bonzes protect me.

In this, as in the other temples are to be found the conduit for the holy water, the pulpit, the sunshades, the divinities which lay hands on the faithful, the adorned gods and the Buddhas with clasped hands (Pra Hopokoute), while in the adjoining pagoda of more recent construction are twenty rows of small gilt Buddhas placed close beside one another against the wall.

In going back to the market street, we pass the residence of the Siamese Colonel, the barracks and the house being built for the members of the English survey party.

Following the main street eastward, we at last reach the important temple of Tâte Loung (literally,

grand monument), which is situated upon a grassy eminence, the temple being white in colour and having a double roof of light tiles. This building seems bright and trim by comparison with those already visited, but when we come to examine it more closely we find that the medallions of carved wood between the two roofs are of considerable antiquity, while the interior is not so interesting as that of several others. It is here that the king and the people confer the principal religious orders, and this is why it is called the royal pagoda. I may add that there are several small pagodas of less importance upon the right bank. Having endeavoured to portray in the preceding pages the habits and mode of life of a Laos state and to describe its capital, I may devote a few words to the New Year *fêtes* at Luang Prabang, of which I was fortunate enough to be a spectator.

*April* 11*th.*

This is a day of great rejoicing, being the celebration of the *Mahason crane paï* (the calendar being finished goes away), the change of year being observed here in the fifth month, instead of in the fourth as at Nan. This and the rejoicings in the twelfth month are the two most important of the *fêtes* held in nearly every week of the year. This *fête* is very similar to that of the Annamite Têt, except that here it extended over nearly a fortnight.

We pay an early visit to the market and find the streets crowded, the women being attired in their finest things, and being loaded with bracelets and necklaces of gold, while the market itself is full of

birds in cages, which it is considered to be a very meritorious act to purchase and let loose. This Laos custom is very general among the Buddhists, and I remember seeing at Batang a Chinese soldier who, as he caught his fish, put them into a bucketful of water, the Thibetans giving him money at the close of the day to put them back into the river.

I notice also some iguanas, the flesh of which is said to be excellent, but they are so quick in their movements that they can only be caught by dogs trained to the work. Flowers, including piles of gardenias picked in the gardens, four varieties of orchid and red and white flowers from different trees, are also bought in large quantities for the decoration of the pagodas, and at the stalls set up in the open is sold vermicelli cooked with grasshoppers, a small bag made out of banana leaves answering the purpose of a cup. As in Tonkin and Japan, at the boys' fête, many people carry paper bags made to imitate fish, while streamers with designs of animals upon them are used for certain games.

There is great animation in the streets, nearly all the inhabitants finding their way into the main thoroughfares, shouting, buying, discussing, eating, and smoking until the religious ceremony begins. The bonzes have brought into the open all their gods, excepting the large statue at the further end of the pagoda, and proceed to put them through their toilet. The women, in the meanwhile, are visiting the pagodas, the general rule being to go to those situated in another parish to that to which they belong. The evening is spent in shouting and singing, like the last.

*April* 12*th.*

As we cross the stream, we notice all along the banks tiny rafts conveying presents, notably rice, and these are offerings made by the boatmen in order that they may take plenty of fish, and be favoured by the weather while out with their boats.

In the town the statues are still out in the open, or rather they are placed under a small scaffolding, the sacred water conduit pouring out its contents drop by drop through the dragon's mouth in which it terminates at one end, while the other end is in the pagoda and is being fed by the priests, long tapers with strips of paper bearing the donor's name are burning before the altar.

In the main street we encounter a *cortége* which is coming from Ouate Tâte to Ouate Sieng Tong, and this is supposed to be the old year which is being thus escorted. It is curious, in this connection, to note that the old year is fetched from the west, while the new year will come from the east, but I do not know whether this is due to chance or is a matter of tradition.

Be this as it may, the order and composition of the procession are regulated by rites of very long standing. At the head of the procession march young men with flowers in their hands, then two rows of bearers of red and white umbrellas for the temple, behind them coming six or eight men carrying upon their shoulders one of those gilt chairs which are used in the pagodas as pulpits, and upon

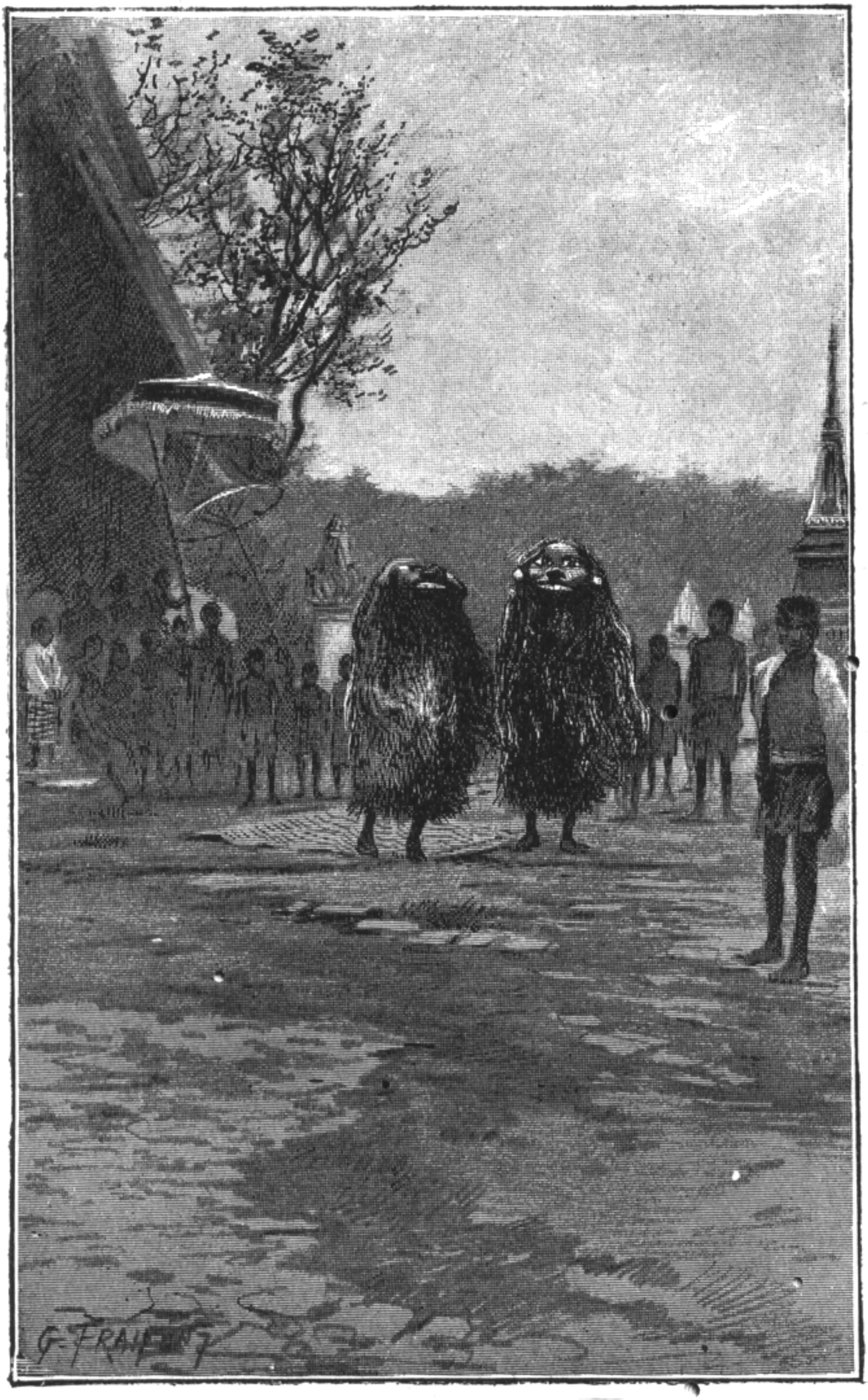
a bamboo with a mat at the end of it shaped like a lotus leaf. Following him comes a *cortége* of bonzes and students in yellow, belonging to six pagodas, singing in chorus or making response to one another, while at an interval of about fifty yards, a number of young girls march in regular order, the smallest coming first. They all have a yellow scarf over their dress, and each has a parasol according to her size, from the tiny European sunshades to the vast Chinese umbrellas of oiled paper, and each of them carries a silver jar full of flowers for the pagodas or of water for the libations. Picturesque as this spectacle is, it is not the most curious part of this "festival of the women," as it might well be called.

Women sprinkle water over the chief bonze, and others bolder still, come and pour the contents of their jar over some young student. This custom of sprinkling or pouring water, which is also to be met with at certain festivals in Siam and Burmah, would not be so surprising if it were confined to the priests, but here the girls pick up mud and plaster the faces of the young men, whoever they may be, and our white dresses tempt them so much that we are obliged to assume a very stern look in order to keep them at a distance. The young men, however, are too gallant to resent these attentions, and as for the bonzes, they get something better than water offered them, as presents are made them in the shape of pans full of food, which are handed to two men who accompany the chair.

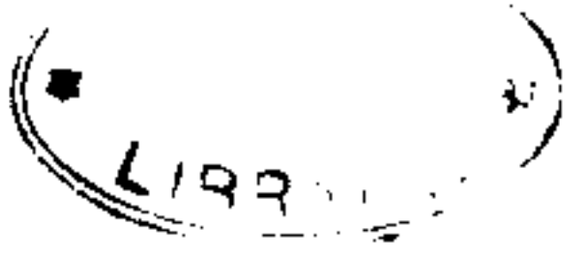
When the procession reaches Ouate Sieng Tong, it enters the courtyard, and the bonzes, after reciting

the usual prayers, enter a sort of shed surrounded by planks and having upon the top the same water conduit which has been used for sprinkling water over the gods. The women pour their water into this conduit, which flows down over the priests, who emerge from the shed purified and washed, but dripping wet, though this they do not seem to mind. This ceremony over, the dances begin, and two men emerge from the pagoda enveloped in vast cloaks coming down to their heels which are meant to designate the skin of some wild animal, while they have on their heads a mask of black wood representing some monster with enormous eyes, large mouth with very sharp teeth, very long ears and a lower jaw which can be moved at will. Behind the head is a long mane of coarse hair, and we are told that they are known as *Pi Konge*, or devils with a cruel face, while the old bonze says that they are the *chiefs of the tigers*, or the *Pi Sua* (race of devils). The Siamese Colonel adds that in the Laos they are known as *Pou Yen* (from *Pou*, father) or *Ya Yen* (from *Ya*, mother), and there is a legend that men of this kind once lived in a large forest, and that though they inspired great terror two of them were captured, these monsters representing the captive pair. It is interesting to compare this native tradition with the assertion of several travellers that the Laos was formerly inhabited by a hairy race of men.

Whatever be the origin of these two "monsters," they seem to amuse the crowd very much, and when after having knelt in front of the pagoda and wished the spectators a happy new year, they begin to dance,



NEW YEAR DANCES AT OUATE SIENG TONG, LUANG PRABANG.


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self-same dance which I saw when travelling through Thibet with M. Bonvalot two years before. The steps and the attitudes are exactly the same, and it would be interesting to know whether this is a mere chance or due to the existence of the same traditions between peoples living so far apart. The tam-tam, which is beaten by hand, without any rhythm, is the music used as an accompaniment, and from time to time the monsters make a charge and send the crowd flying, one of them chasing a young girl round a tree. I can see only Laotians among the spectators, the Kas holding aloof. When the dances are over, the procession starts on its way back, the priests being escorted back to their several pagodas.

At nightfall, the town is still very animated, the pagodas being the scenes of ceremonies known as *Ngones*, which, to judge by the one I witnessed at Ouate Maï, are very well worth a description. Ten young girls were seated or rather were squatting upon their heels against the wall, most of them having a red scarf passed over the right shoulder and under the left arm. The only light was that afforded by two or three earthenware saucers filled with oil in which a wick was floating. A dish containing quids of betel-nut and a bamboo to serve as a spittoon were handed round. Facing the girls were seated one or two groups of young men playing upon the guitar, the tam-tam and a sort of Laotian organ made of bamboo. Several of them are singing, but when they do so they put a corner of their scarf over their head so as not to be seen, while others take up the chorus. While

the former taking up his place opposite the girl of his fancy. This goes on until two in the morning, being much like the flirtation of other countries, with this difference that there is no dancing and that conversation with the unmarried girls is more free than with married women. In one of the pagodas we visit, I can hear the prayers of the bonzes mingling with the soft whisperings of the love-stricken swain, one of whom delivers himself thus :—

"Oh ! my love, you who are my very own heart, I love none but you. It is you only whom I love. You are white and green like the eggs of a crow. I implore of you to be my life."

There are also certain games played at these gatherings, one of these being very much like that known to us as "questions and answers," while there is another played with bits of paper, which resembles that of "mother goose."

The same festivals are celebrated on April 13th and 14th, except that it is the eastern pagodas which bring in the new year and conduct it westward to Ouate Tâte Loung.

The 15th is a more interesting day for us, as the king is to make a progress through the streets, the event being announced early in the morning by two of the four guns which the Siamese have mounted here.

When we arrive at the pagoda of Ouate Uisonne, we find that the crowd is already very great, and that women are bringing to the pagoda flowers and meats placed in large dishes. From the street to the entrance of the temple the path is covered with bamboo mats ; the peristyle is draped with yellow

silk, beneath which the king is seated and is taking tea, while the bonzes are reciting prayers inside. The same dances described above are again performed, with the addition this time of a third figure, viz., that of a dragon with a golden head and jaws like a crocodile, the body being formed of material which has a blue stripe down the middle of the back. There are two men inside, and the monster, which goes through the most extraordinary contortions, is called *Tsinng* (the lion).

The orchestra is reinforced by flute players, their instrument consisting of a simple bamboo cane pierced with holes and having at one end a notch upon which the player rests his upper lip.

Men of the king's household bear swords, the sheath of which is of chased gold, while the handle is of horn studded with precious stones. These swords are over 200 years old, and very fine, but the blade is common. Others carry lances with wooden shafts and silver bands at the top, the iron of the lance being encased in a red sheath. I also notice a javelin, the iron of which is crescent shaped with a notch at the lower end.

The king comes and greets us after he has taken his tea; he seems to be amiable and intelligent, but, as at all our other interviews, timid and ill at ease, especially with the Siamese Colonel upon the one side and us upon the other. As soon as our audience is over, he ascends the small wooden construction over which the water conduit is placed, and his servitors bring him one after the other several jugs of water which he pours into it and which trickle down, drop by drop, upon a Buddha placed on

a gilt chair in an adjoining building. After a few more prayers in the pagoda, he returns home, preceded by his courtiers, who are dressed in the Laos fashion, like the rest of the people, without any distinguishing sign, and who carry cups, boxes, a teapot, and other articles all of wrought gold, and most of them given by the King of Siam. It is surprising to notice side by side with these a small yellow tin box containing clothes, a French deal box, painted to represent carriages and horses, a phial containing scent, and a crystal bottle such as one may see in a hairdresser's shop. All this is indicative of what must happen in a country which is overrun, as this one will be, by the bad taste of what I may call a cheap and nasty civilisation. Every one kneels in the dust as the monarch passes by, behind him being four bearers of parasols, two white and two green. The *cortége* is a lengthy one, being headed by a group of horsemen, bare legged, and with their toes resting upon the edge of very broad stirrups; their dress consisting of a small white jacket and a broad brimmed felt hat. Then comes a mandarin in a wooden palanquin, upon each side of him being a man who carries a bamboo mat to protect him from the mud which the young girls endeavour to throw at him. A troop of children who come along clapping their hands are succeeded by two broad-wheeled waggons, one of which is drawn by a horse, and the other by men, and by three elephants conveying in a howdah, made of osier to protect them from the sun, officers of a lower grade. Behind them, with the Laos soldiers, preceded by six trumpeters, comes the guard dressed in yellow tick and wearing round caps, striped blue and white. The

standard of Luang Prabang is white, with a parti-coloured dragon like that of China, while a second white flag with a red border, upon which can be traced the outlines of an elephant, must be Siamese.

The soldiers are followed by the musicians and certain instruments, such as the drums and the cymbals, are placed upon a wooden square which is suspended by ropes from the shoulders of several bearers, the player marching in the centre. Then come more soldiers, naked to the waist, sword-bearers, lance-bearers, and cane-bearers, the canes being tied up with some red material in bundles.

Last of all comes the king, seated upon a very small gilt throne with no dome to it and borne by eight men, facing the king being two children on their knees. He is wearing a small white jacket, a silken *langouti* and a rather dirty old gray helmet, with an European sunshade in his hand; the rear guard is formed by young Laotians, intoxicated with tchoum-tchoum, many of them bearing upon their faces marks of the mud thrown by the young girls.

*April* 16*th.*

This is a day of rest, so far as the official *fêtes* are concerned, but, as one of the chief bonzes puts it, "the women are pleased, and therefore they sing." I have said enough to show how much there is of interest to be seen and observed in the streets of Luang Prabang itself, but a longer and more varied experience is required to describe the habits and environments of a people; the conditions of climate and the nature of the soil, its means of defence and its natural resources.

So far as the ethnography, the flora and the fauna of Laos are concerned, no better authority is to be had than the French naturalist, Henri Monhot, whose scientific missions were paid for with English money and who succumbed to an attack of fever at Luang Prabang on the 10th of November, 1861. A small monument erected to his memory by the Garnier Mission was restored by M. Pavie, and it is a white-washed cenotaph upon which may be read in blue letters the inscription

H. Monhot,
1890.

The site of this is a space which has been cleared in the woods which skirt the Nam Kane about an hour's march above Luang Prabang, Monhot having died in a village beyond this. The chief of a Leu village receives six piastres to keep the monument in order and collect insects, besides being the ballet-master and master of ceremonies in his native place.

Upon the right bank of the Nam Kane is a hill of chalk, with large blocks covering the slopes, and the tradition is that they are not there by chance but were placed there by order of former sovereigns as a hiding-place for their treasures.

The fauna of Indo-China has been studied in so much detail by the expeditions of Garnier, Monhot, Neis, Harmand, and others, that I cannot do better than refer the reader whom this subject may happen to interest, to the records of their researches; and with regard to the flora it is very varied, among the most interesting features of it being the beautiful parasite

very well wooded, too, and I have been able to bring back some forty specimens of wood, chief among which I may mention the teak, called the *maï sok*, which grows in large quantities on the banks of the Mekong, a few days above Luang Prabang, near Kiangsen, and below the city, near Paklay.

The mode of concession for the forests in Siam must lead to a complete disappearance of the best timber, the holder of the concession being at liberty to cut down as much as he pleases. The result will be that the timber required for the navy will have to be purchased in Burmah, where the English have the sense to prevent waste, or on the Mekong. At the present time two vegetable products are exported from Luang Prabang, one being *cardamome* and the other benzoin, the latter having recently decreased 50 per cent. in value on the Bangkok market, doubtless because this perfume is now extracted from hippuric acid and other matters by chemical processes, while in time the flora of the country, which is very rich in other wild plants highly perfumed, will doubtless lend itself to fresh sources of industry.

In addition to the native products it will be easy to introduce fresh cultivations, such as the pepper tree, which already thrives in Annam, the vine, which grows wild on the plateau of the Poûon, and fruit trees of various kinds. There is a great deal of mineral wealth, too, in the Laos country, and among the many gold fields which might be worked to advantage are Pac Bay (above Luang Prabang), Xieng Mang, and Xieng Mon. There is an abundance of antimony, lead, copper, and iron, while there are agates and chalcedonies near Luang Prabang. Then,

*in the* neighbourhood of Kiangsen, there is a ruby mine belonging to the king of Nan, which is not yet worked, though a Burmese has applied for a concession. But though the natural products of Luang Prabang are so varied, the cost of transport over so long a distance from the coast would reduce the profits very considerably, though I think that the complaints of the Chinese traders as to business being carried on at a loss must be an exaggeration, for if so why do they carry it on?

In any event, it is difficult to form a precise estimate of the commerce of the principality. According to the Siamese the exports from the Laos region, which includes the country between Strung Treng and Xiangsen in one direction, and Xieng Maï and Attopen in the other, amount to about £900,000, and if this estimate is correct the proportion of Luang Prabang must be very small. Macey gives the exports of benzoin at £40,000, but if this was so at one time the total must have decreased very much.

But trifling as the commercial movement of Luang Prabang may be, it is of interest to us, because of the situation of the town upon the Mekong, nearly in the centre of the Laos and in the vicinity of Tonkin, to see what share we may hope to have in it and what profit can be derived from it. Opinions vary very much upon the subject, and Mr. Archer, the British Consul, whose statistical reports as to the trade of this region are well worth careful study, is of opinion that there is little to fear from French competition, the cost of transport being too great, and with regard to steam navigation, he does not deem it possible upon the Mekong, on account of the rapids upon the other

hand. I have read several articles in the *Bangkok Times* to the effect that the French have great facilities for getting into their hands all trade upon the Mekong, and that to guard against this Siam ought to push on the construction of railways with all speed. Then, again, Mr. Macey and Captain Devrez assert that the Tonkin routes are much shorter, easier, and less expensive than those leading to Bangkok.

Whatever the truth may be, of one thing I can speak positively, and that is that the greater part of the commercial current of Luang Prabang either comes from or goes to Bangkok. This current follows one of two routes. It either proceeds from Luang Prabang to Paklay by the Mekong; Paklay to Pitchai or Ontaradit by land and from thence to Bangkok down the Menam (this being the way by which we returned), a voyage of twenty-six days going down and fifty-two coming up. The second route is from Luang Prabang to Nong Kay by the Mekong; from Nong Kay to Korat and from Korat to Bangkok, this being rather the longer of the two. These routes, though shorter than that which brings Luang Prabang and Tonquin within a month of each other, have the advantage of being safer both by water and by land, there being no rapids on the Menam, while the roads are wide enough for elephants to travel easily along them and might easily have rails laid down. Owing to the facility of the communications, the cost of transport between Luang Prabang and Bangkok is if not cheaper, at all events not dearer than those *via* the Black River, and as I have been over the two routes myself I am in a

position to make the comparison. M. Massie, moreover, has arrived at the same conclusion.

The trade of Laos, like that of the greater part of Siam, is carried on by the Chinese, who form a sort of freemasonry among one another against the foreigner and are constantly pushing forward their advance posts. Masters of the Customs, more intelligent, more hard working, more temperate and more rapacious than the Siamese, they constitute the commercial class, and they have a way of insinuating themselves into the secrets of the natives and transferring their money into their own pockets which we neither could nor would wish to imitate. Our task is a higher one, and it consists, upon the one hand, in undertaking and carrying out such enterprises in the way of mining as I have described above, and upon the other in supplying the native or Chinese middlemen with the raw material and with our national goods upon as reasonable terms as English or German merchandise.

It has been suggested that instead of transforming our products to suit the Annamites and the Laotians, we should get them to change their taste, but, even if this false train of reasoning were true, that would not solve the problem of how to extend our political and commercial influence in the valley of the Mekong. In order to do that, we should have to be first in the field, and at less expense than our neighbours.

But what are they doing in the meanwhile? they have commenced making a railway from Bangkok to Korat and they are sending up the rivers gunboats which are put together after they have reached their destination. "Once the line is completed," as Mr.

Archer remarks, "neither Cambodia nor Annam will be able to hold their own against Siam in competing for the trade of the valley of the Mekong." Unless, as I would add, we contrive to compete upon equal terms, and to meet rail with rail and steamer with steamer, opposing to the Korat line, which is intended to unite the gulf and port of Bangkok with the Mekong, a much shorter line connecting the great river with the coast of Annam. This line might be made between Vinh and Houtene, or, better still, if the information of Captain Cupet and Captain de Malglaive may be trusted, between Tourane, which is destined by its position, in the centre of the Indo-Chinese curve, as by the breadth and depth of its bay, to become the chief port of Annam, and Ban Mone, by way of Quang Tri and Ailao. The line might perhaps terminate at this latter town, whence canoes at all seasons, and sloops during three months out of the twelve, can reach the Mekong. The distance from the coast is inconsiderable, and the maximum of altitude is 1,000 feet. The Annamites were right when they named the village built upon the Tchepone "Ai Lao," the gate of the Laos, for it is by there that all the trade of the Upper Mekong must pass as far as the confluence of the Sehang Hien. So soon as goods can be brought to Ai Lao at a low freight, and that steam sloops can navigate the Mekong and its tributaries, the commercial current of Luang Prabang will be diverted, to our advantage, from the route over which it travels at present. We should no longer have any reason to be afraid of Korat or Bangkok, and Tourane will be the Bombay of Annam, the *entrepôt* of the Laos.

With the tide of commerce setting eastward, trade with Xieng Maï, which is at present carried on overland by elephant caravans, passing through the principality of Nan, or to Thareua (eight days above Luang Prabang), and thence by rafts on the Mekong, will be considerably reduced, the rate of transport is not very high, but articles which have already travelled a considerable distance to reach Xieng Maï, have cost so much that they cannot rival with the stocks in depot at Tourane.

As to trade with the north, with the Sibsompanas and with China, it is already falling off. We find here, upon a smaller scale, the same phenomenon which in Tonkin has been one of the causes of the check in commercial transactions with adjoining provinces; the opium monopoly has been set up in Luang Prabang by the Siamese. Not content with having, during the past century, ruined and depopulated the valley of the Mekong, and with weighing it down with taxation, they now seem anxious to crush its trade and arrest its growth. From our point of view, it is a matter of indifference to us if the relations between Luang Prabang and China become less close and friendly, and we may even turn this change to our profit, for the caravans which were wont to bring opium down the routes parallel with the Mekong, will find it answer their purpose to branch off in the direction of the Black River, and to effect their exchanges with Upper Tonkin.

I can answer for the fact that during the past year only one caravan reached Luang Prabang from the north, this consisting of sixty mules from Xieng

Hong, which took a month upon the journey by short stages, eight being loaded with iron, four with tea, and the rest with Chinese groceries, sugar, opium and a little silk.

In short, trusting to what I saw and to the information supplied me, I arrive at the following conclusions. The Laos is not nearly so rich a country as has been generally asserted, the trade of Luang Prabang more especially being insignificant. There is not an opening for more than one or two French houses, who should make it their business to act as middlemen for an European stock of goods, to purchase the native products, to develop as far as possible among a people naturally inclined to be lazy local industries, to undertake, with Kas workmen, the extraction of minerals and the cutting of timber. But in order to establish our political and commercial influence in the Laos, it is not enough that we should speak our mind at Bangkok, we must make the most of the advantages which the proximity of the coasts of Annam give us.

With this object in view, what we should do is to set about the making of a carriage road pending the construction of a railway which will connect the coast with the nearest point at which the navigation upon one of the branches of the Mekong begins, while the terminus of the line upon the coast must be where there is a safe harbour for trading vessels. In my judgment, Tourane, with its magnificent bay and its coal supply, or Ai Lao, with the Tchepone at its feet, would be the two best places. But the work should be commenced without delay, and I would ask those

who counsel delay to cast their eyes across the Mekong and see how busy the English and the Germans are making the line to Korat. Perhaps they would then admit that we have no time to lose unless we wish to illustrate for the benefit of our neighbours in Asia the fable of the hare and the tortoise.

# CHAPTER VIII.

**Our Return.—From Luang Prabang to Bangkok—On the Mekong; Rapids—Paklay; Court of Love—Upon Elephants in the Forest—The Menam; the Chinese; the Trade—Pac Nam Po; Europeans—Bangkok.**

HAVING decided to leave Luang Prabang for Bangkok, I have the choice of four principal routes; through Xieng Maï and Raheng down the Meping; through Nan going directly overland from Luang Prabang to the Menam; through Paklay, spending some days in descending the Mekong, and going on then to strike the Menam at Pitchai or Ontaradit; and finally by Nong Kay on the Mekong and thence to Korat. Our state of health and also the lateness of the season leads us to adopt the shortest of these, *vid* Paklay, which has, moreover, to my eyes, this advantage, that it is one of the most frequented of the trade routes, and will give me some idea of the navigation of the Mekong.

On April 17th in the afternoon, we bid good-bye to MM. Massie and Counillon, and to all the officials at the consulate, and set out. Our boat is large and comfortable, being a palace in comparison with the canoes of the Black River or the Nam Ou. A bamboo flooring is placed on two parallel canoes the

roof is high enough to permit one to stand erect beneath it. The whole with its three compartments, carries besides ourselves the interpreter, the boys, and eight oarsmen ; four of whom are in the prow, while two have oars in the direction of the boat's axis to guide it when in the rapids. We quickly settle ourselves into this floating house, in one corner being our beds ; while in the middle is a table and some chairs, and at one end an improvised oven, made of sand and stones, which serves as kitchen.

After a fortnight of incessant activity at Luang Prabang we are not sorry to rest aboard. The time goes quickly. Our boatmen are amiable and reply willingly to our questions. In the evening, as the nights are superb, I question them on astronomy, and find that they know most of the constellations. The Great Bear they call the Elephant. The "bands of Orion" go by the name of the Bow, because of the two small stars at the side which suggest an arrow. Venus is "the star not loved by pigs," because, as they say, it is so bright that pigs do not eat when they see it.

From the stars and the heavens we pass to the other life. Upon this subject our crew refer us to the old men for information. They themselves know little ; they believe that charitable people will be recompensed, taking on another individuality after death, and that the wicked will go to hell. "There are, however, at Luang Prabang," they add, "some men who do not believe in hell, who do not give to the *bonzes*, who drink tchoum-tchoum, and who smoke opium."

As for the five Siamese soldiers who follow us on a small raft, we can get nothing out of them. Attached to our suite by the Siamese Colonel, under

pretext of protecting and helping us, they are really, I believe, nothing but spies. But we pay very little attention to them.

As far up as to Paklay navigation is easy enough. The stream of an average width of 330 to 650 feet, is bordered by woods, or low hills. The water is shallow and discovers little islands or big sand-banks.

Rapids are numerous, and several, such as Keng Sanai or Keng Luong, are dangerous. The black schist rocks, some of them seventeen feet high, and strewn confusedly in every direction, form a serious obstruction, and between them, in the narrow passages, the water descends in a smooth firm current, which glides with a dizzy swiftness, or rises into high waves. At other times it breaks against a wall of rock, suddenly changes its direction, and forms with the main current whirlpools like funnels. The passage of a small canoe through this hubbub of waters must be frightful. With our rafts, our men, who are very expert, manage marvellously, but they are often forced to bale out the water.

The rapids have no special name "We call them," say our boatmen, "what we have heard our fathers call them. The rapids were made by God with the world, like the mountains and the rivers."

Happy they who do not tire themselves out in the search for first causes!

Some of the rocks have a story of their own. In the afternoon of the 20th we leave on our left a chalk cliff, which descends precipitously from a height of some 650 feet into the stream. On the sides of the mountain the trees manage to cling somehow or other, and numerous fissures, forming here and there

grottoes visible up to a great height, while black portions of the rock, harder than the rest and washed by the rain, hang in gigantic stalactites.

In vain I search with my glass the nooks and corners in the hope of finding a pagoda. There are no statues, but at about 160 feet from the top, on a white surface, I make out a sort of escutcheon, filled with small rows of Buddhas.

This rock is called Pakao (the white rock). A Kha, runs the tradition, having ventured upon the summit to look at the river, was carried over the edge by a strong wind, and touched the water. But far from being killed he swam for some miles down stream and was received by the canoes of a village. The inhabitants, marvelling at what had occurred, fell prostrate before the Kha, gave him presents and named him their king.

On the right bank, the village of Muong Liep (Diap on the map), once important, now possesses only a few houses. The gardens are full of fruit trees, cocoa trees, areca nut trees, oranges, bananas, and the *mak tan ta late*,[1] which are eaten with a spoon.

We cannot buy any rice, the inhabitants having very little. They got it from Nam Ou, or certain villages especially given to its growth.

In front of the huts pods gathered from the trees are drying, full of seeds which are surrounded by a silky down like those of some of our poplars. It is known as *nghioue*, and it is used here for pillows and mattresses.

I note, also, on the dryers, tobacco in shreds.

This plant grows well here, and one sees it everywhere about the villages, rank as weeds.

After leaving Muong Liep we camp at the right of the river near a sand-bank covered with the remains of former encampments. A hundred paces off is a large pond some 150 feet broad and of considerable length. It owes its name to its green waters, *nong kiou* (green pond). In the month of February people come from all directions, and even from Luang Prabang, to camp on its edge and to fish. Many big fish are caught here, but how, we are told, they are in a cavern which extends under the sand-bank. I do not know how true this may be, but it is certain that in walking on the sand and striking it, a hollow sound is heard. Before fishing two bullocks are sacrificed to the dragon of the lake, and tchoum-tchoum is drunk.

When we talk of fishing ourselves with dynamite our boatmen dissuade us: "they cannot dive because of the dragon."

In the night we have a storm and rain, as the season is beginning to change.

On the following morning we reach Paklay. The river here is broad with sand-banks on either side and water just covering the top of the rocks. The village is situated on the right bank. The piles which support the houses are hid by a net-work of bamboo, arranged also to shut in the animals. A fairly clean hut is set apart for us, as we are to stay here for a day. The Siamese lieutenant has ordered our elephants, but we cannot have them before to-morrow, so I employ a part of the day in

called, is not large, having 780 inhabitants, including women and children. The Siamese garrison is made up of eighty men, and is shifted every three years. The lieutenant lives in one half of a rather large house, and the other half is occupied by Chinese merchants.

Paklay owes its importance to its situation on the Mekong at the extremity of the shortest route from the Menam. In the neighbourhood there is a good deal of teak which might be advantageously exploited. Wild animals abound, stags and oxen being killed for their antlers and horns. Some years ago, I am told, a tapir was killed near here, but native information is so little to be trusted that no confidence can be put in this story, and I have never before heard it said, moreover, that tapirs come so high up.

We gather information as to the route which we are to follow from the second King of Luang Prabang, who has just returned that way from Bangkok. He lives near us in an enormous room, which his baggage has transformed into a veritable *bric-à-brac* shop. There are glass-globes, imitation paper flowers under glass, European hats, cooking utensils, and cruets, indeed, a little of everything which has attracted the prince in the way of European civilisation. After living twenty-two months at Bangkok, he is returning to Luang Prabang slowly by easy stages. Elegantly turned out, he seems franker than his brother, and after exchanging visits he sends us a present of cocoanuts and bananas.

In the evening the Siamese lieutenant invites us to a particularly original *fête*. Upon a small terrace in

busts draped in gold-thread scarves of native make. Opposite them a dozen young men take their places. A man carrying a Laotian organ, which he has difficulty in setting up, follows them. The pipes of the organ are so long—nearly 14 feet—that he is finally obliged to cut a hole in the roof, but the damage can be easily repaired.

We are about to assist at a good game of repartee, between the men and the women, a sort of literary joust.

Each camp has its champion. On one side a young man, with a rather expressive face, contorts his facial muscles so as to produce every sort of mimicry. Opposite is an old woman with a wrinkled and pock-marked skin, though her ugliness does not prevent her, from possessing the gift of quick retort. The organ plays continually on a grave key in a sort of bass, while the persons present accompany it by clapping their hands at certain measures.

When the woman rejects her questioner's propositions, the latter takes two small candles, made of a little wax coiled round a few threads, holds them fixed with the thumb nail, and gesticulates, turning his hands and moving his arms in passes like those of a hypnotiser. To these movements correspond certain shruggings of the shoulders, contractions of the mouth, distortions of the nose, and wrigglings in consonance with the measure of the organ music. When the grimaces are funny the women mark their satisfaction by bursting into peals of laughter.

Of the group of young men some interrupt to support or excite their champion, or they repeat a

the meaning of which is not clear to either the Siamese lieutenant or the interpreter. There is also a series of exclamations, which each one repeats twice, these cries corresponding to our shouts of encouragement: "Keep it up," "don't flinch," "steady," and the like: *Aou! aou! aoua! ioua! pemma! sempa! satna!*

Sometimes the singing is in *crescendo* time and the singer seems to be in a hurry. The company becomes excited, encouraging and urging him on. A brass bowl is continually passed round, flowing over with tchoum-tchoum. The animation becomes greater and greater and the party breaks up amid a general hubbub.

Here are some scraps of the chanted dialogue which I took down from the lips of the interpreter.

HE.—"I am very well off. I even have some elephants."

SHE.—"I am not free."

HE.—"If you marry me, you will have nothing to do, and you will be free to act as you wish."

SHE.—"I am married. I have a child."

HE.—"That doesn't matter. I'll arrange with your husband so that he will let you go."

The chorus replies in a refrain too free to be reproduced here.

SHE.—"You are married."

HE.—"Ask the inhabitants of the village; I am not married."

SHE.—"I have known for a long time that you are poor. You haven't even a rupee."

HE.—"I haven't a rupee, but we will go into business and we shall have a good deal of money."

SHE.—"Don't you hope to marry me?"

THE CHORUS.—"It is sad to marry an old woman."

HE.—"I cannot marry you now, but later on when your husband is dead. You have a very pretty face, pretty as the god in the centre of the pagoda, who is so beautiful that I dare not look at him."

And he pretends to run away in terror. The young girls burst into laughter.

SHE.—"At a small rivulet there is not very much to drink."

HE.—"Here are two candles. My face is well lighted. Does it please you or not? You must say."

SHE.—"I love you, and you don't love me. Whom am I to marry?"

HE.—"When we die, we will die together; we shall be burned together."

SHE.—"When the flames mount up you will leave the young married woman."

He goes up to the group of girls, and lights them with the candles, then returns to make love to the old woman.

HE.—"If you become my wife I will not abandon you. I could not find any one so pretty as you."

SHE.—"We are going to bid you good-bye. If you love me we shall meet again in a few days."

HE.—"When I go away from here I shall find no girl so pretty as you. I shall die."

Upon this the party breaks up. We are guarded during the night by a sentinel who, every quarter of an hour answers by two strokes on a small gong the strokes of the large one at the pagoda. It is the *garde à vous* of our sentinels.

*April 22nd.*

Our elephants having been brought to us at an early hour, we load them immediately and set out.

Our convoy comprises seven animals, smaller than those we had in India. Ours carry only 100 *tchangs* (2½ cwt.). They are owned by a few families and not by the villagers in common. An animal fifteen years old is worth from six to seven tchangs, or from about 480 to 560 rupees. The one I am riding is valued at 640 rupees. The elephants require much care, which is the more readily given them as they represent a fortune for their owners. They are liable to fall ill and suffer particularly from diarrhœa. They are then treated with indigo and sugar cane.

Each elephant has two men to tend it. They take turns in driving it, in riding on its neck and in walking behind it. The man who walks behind often lops off small branches for the animal to eat. At night, one of them sleeps near the *aoudah*, while the other remains with the elephant. Our saddles are attached to the animals, but changed several times a night to allow them to feed on the pastures.

I am pleased to find again these good big beasts with which I passed such a pleasant month in India. Although the keepers appear to me to be kinder here, the elephants are less intelligent, or rather not so well trained; for, as elsewhere, they were captured wild. They are not very prolific in India when domesticated, but in Cambodia, on the contrary, our interpreter says, they are more so. The father of Takiate who has owned two for the last fifteen years, has had a young one which he sold to the king.

On the march, too, the Laotian elephants seem to me inferior to their fellows of India. The leaders do barely two miles an hour over good ground. This slow, regular and almost mathematical pace, however, permits very precise operations with the compass, but otherwise is very tiresome. One ends, however, by getting used to the *aoudah* and by taking it for better or worse. Imagine a harness of the heaviest materials and the roughest workmanship, resting directly on the animal's back, and kept in place by a palm-tree thong. In front is a strap passing across the breast, and behind a rather loose crupper made of a stick held by two cords. Upon the harness rises a small plated bamboo chest, largest at the top and covered by a sort of large straw rug. The baggage is put into this chest. For travellers it is covered with a bamboo plant, and a railing or projection behind allows one to stow away one's bag, trappings, gun, &c. The legs are crossed or they hang down in front; or more often one lies down in the shape of a Z.

In front the driver, with his feet passed through a thong in place of stirrups, drives the beast, guiding him with his legs. He rarely speaks to him, and I have never seen him use the prod which he holds in his hand. He seldom descends from his perch during the day, and in crossing a river he lets down with a string a small bamboo tube which he pulls up to drink.

We stop as little as possible, carrying some provisions in our *aoudahs* and eating on the way. The stages are long, for we start at six o'clock in the morning and stop only towards five o'clock.

For three consecutive days we are in the forest, often in the real virgin forest, where enormous lichens hang from the branches, and among immense trees of the fig species, which seem made at the base of numerous little columns close packed one upon the other, but which, only seven or ten feet higher up, become a single smooth white ball. The natives call this tree *Mai Puei*, and it furnishes an excellent material for oars. The landscape here is fine, it being a pleasure to look upon this magnificent vegetation, in the midst of which one seems to be steering one's way like a dwarf, dreading at every step to see the walls of the narrow passage closing about one, and to be choked to death.

Alas! the virgin forest is only the exception, and more often the way lies amidst random woods, consisting of trees which have a bark like that of the oak. These trees are of average height and straight; but instead of branches, large leaves issue from the trunk, as in the dreary forest of Nepaul. Sometimes you find orchids bunched on the trees with pink or yellow flowers and purple spots. I pluck some, in spite of the difficulties in gathering them caused by having to get off and on our animals, and to avoid the ants which are usually found in the roots of these plants and which we cannot escape. Apart from the interest of the orchids (and I have seen only three kinds of these), I know nothing in the world so monotonous as travelling in these woods with the same limited vista ever ahead, devoid of horizon or variety or life. Not a bird note, not a cry, not a living being. You imagine yourself carried back some thousands of years, a silent spectator at one of

the stages of creation. Vegetable life exists in a simple form, but animal life has not yet appeared. I have spent weeks on the steppes when only an occasional animal was to be seen. The lines which bounded them, their extent, their colour, conduced to reverie. But I have never known anything so dreary as this foliage, which is always the same, and which seems to reject every solicitation of a fecundating sun.

We are in the dry season and it is only at night that we find a small rivulet, almost as silent as the nature which surrounds it. And yet, after the sadness of the day, it is for us a deliverance. The elephants are drawn up in line and unloaded. The shelter for the night is set up, and fires lighted. The animals are taken to drink, and we are not sorry to pass an hour or two in cheerful conversation.

In the solitude of these forests the slightest incident arouses our curiosity or attracts our attention. Now it is an elephant who shies off the road, and utters a hoarse cry; now it is a box which gets upset and has to be put right; now it is the meeting with a caravan of oxen. The animals are small with fine heads and shapely legs. They are loaded with long baskets which hang on either side of a hairy saddle and are covered with bamboo. *En route* they wear a sort of muzzle, like the horses in the Yunnam caravans, to prevent them from stopping to eat. Their drivers are, for the most part, inhabitants of a village, which is shifting itself for the time being for rice-growing. They have small tents with canvas or straw flaps.

In dearth of animals or flowers we interest our-

selves in the mineral kingdom. For some time we cross sandstone traversed by calcareous bands in which I find some fossils. Elsewhere we discover in great abundance iron ore spherical in shape like small gun shot.

One afternoon I notice along the way heaps of stones with rectangular bases, the large axis perpendicular to us, and with bits of wood on the sides. A little farther on small circular heaps surround the base of the trees. We finally succeed in getting the information from our men that the spirit of a sorcerer dwells there, and that, when people pass, they throw stones lest he should trouble them.

This custom reminds me of the *obos* so frequent in Central Asia and Thibet. The Siamese soldiers tell us that no such thing exists in Siam. We are here on the territory of Pitchai, which is directly dependent on Bangkok, but with a Laotian population and Laotian in its manners.

The incidents are not frequent enough to alleviate the monotony of the route, and it is with genuine satisfaction that we quit the forests. In the cultivated country we sleep in the *salas* or inns, and there we sometimes have interesting experiences.

On April 26th we stop at a house which serves the double purpose of inn and pagoda, sharing the common room with Burma merchants. They are men of fair complexion, wearing a turban which leaves uncovered a small chignon. An old man has his ears pierced like the Khas.

Our companions have come from Muang Pay to sell their stuffs here, and they are now on their way

the girdle, and several have vermilion medallions on the breast, the back and even the neck.

At sunset we assist at the religious service of the priests. The old bonze strikes the gong, letting it vibrate slowly and softly, and there is something sad about the ceremony. With Europeans, when a gong is used, it is beaten so as to make the most noise possible ; but we do not know how to produce these plaintive and sadly eloquent sounds.

After a few short strokes to summon the pupils, the priest, accompanied by his *bonzillons*, recites the prayer in grave and leisurely accents, a deep silence ensuing.

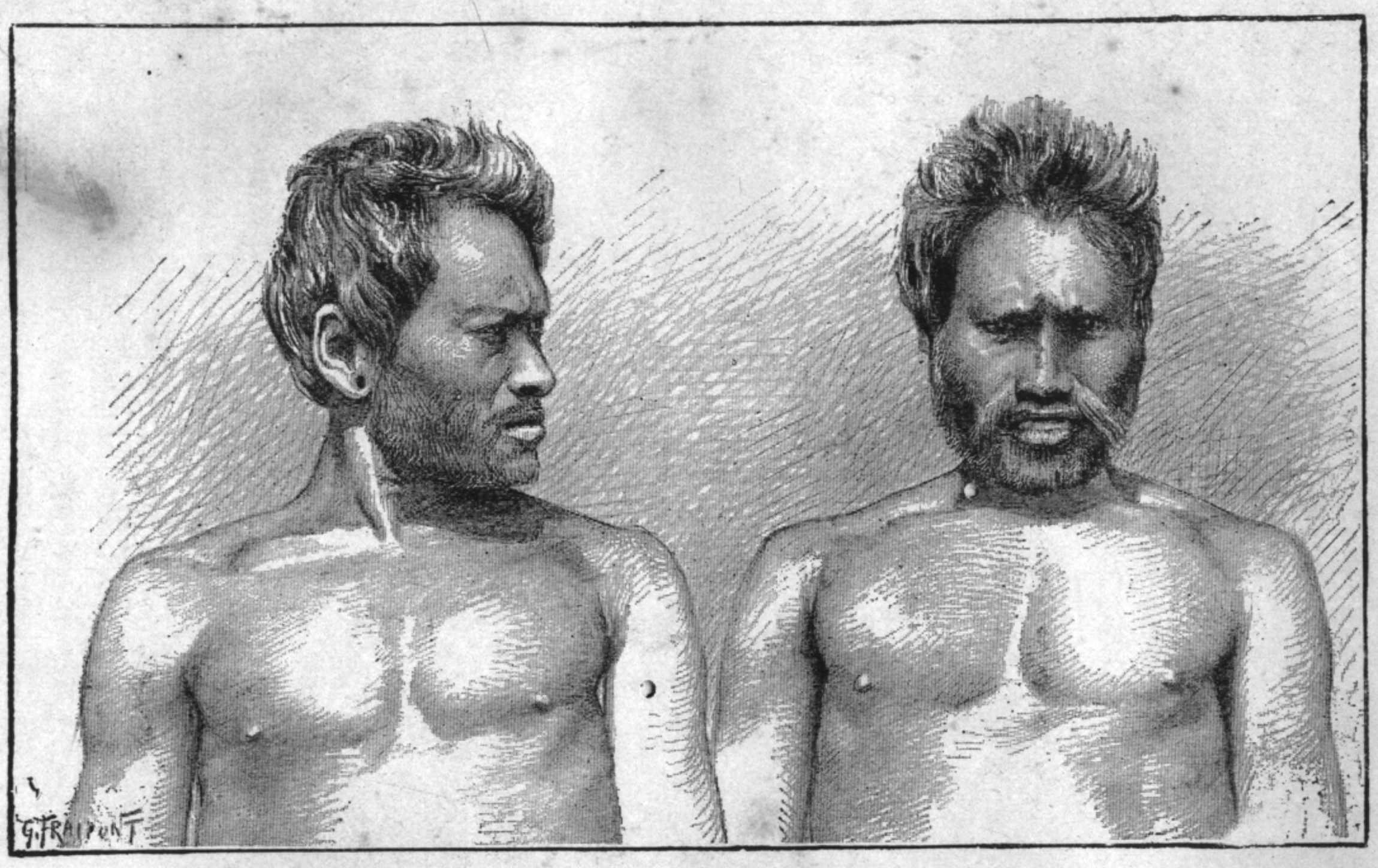
The natives here seem very peaceful, and we get on very well with them. We are looked upon as important personages, or we should not be admitted into the *sala* where we pass the night and which bears the following inscription :—"Reserved for great men and mandarins."

There is, however, one point on which we and the people of the village rarely agree. I own it is the point of chief importance, our food. We arrive late and no one wishes to do business at night. On other occasions they give as an excuse for having neither eggs nor chickens, that it is a dry season. One evening near a village, we are told that there is no water to drink. In consequence of this surly attitude, caused chiefly, as I believe, by the presence of our Siamese soldiers, I am forced to resort to threats. This has a good effect, but I should be glad to get rid of our four body guards, as useless as they are troublesome, obsequious, and of no good whatever in a mess. We

information, whenever they vouchsafe any, is always incorrect. If we occasionally trust to their assurances, we pay dearly for our confidence, as we are sure to be overtaken by nightfall, having lost our way, without bed or board. Assuredly lovers of the picturesque would then be satisfied. The weather is stormy and very dark, our way being occasionally illuminated by the lightning. The elephants walk slowly, while the cries of innumerable frogs produce a frightful and constant clamour, drowned sometimes by the rolling of the thunder. With the night have come the glow-worms which we keep on mistaking for the lights of a village. We advance confidently, and it is only after some minutes that we discover that we have been the victims of an illusion. In the darkness it is something like the *mirage*, a tiring, annoying, disappointing, exasperating sensation to which we would prefer a hundred times over a good table and a good bed. Let me not be accused here of being too matter of fact, for no one has a keener appreciation for poetry. But I think, for my part, that on an empty stomach the muse is a very slight consolation. Let those who do not believe me try the experiment.

On April 30th, having crossed a small cultivated plain, we reach a river 330 feet wide, which rolls a slow and turbid current between sandy banks. It is the Menam, the river of Siam. We stop at the village of Ban Tahit, situated half a mile above the more important town of Outaradit, where we leave our elephants.

This is, practically, the end of our journey. We have reached a well known country which has often




A LAOS MAN (FULL AND SIDE FACE) OUTARADIT, MAY 1ST, 1892.

ascend the Menam in the rainy season, and all we now have to do is to traverse as quickly as possible the intervening distance separating us from Bangkok. And yet, although, or rather because we are in a half-civilised country, this last stage seems to me, if not the most severe, at all events the most wearisome. We seem for ever on the way. The country, too, reminds me, in its monotony, of that of the lower Red River, or of certain parts of the Ganges. Low bluffs are surmounted by dirty villages less picturesque than those of the Mekong. It is only a few days' journey above Bangkok that we begin to find the aspect of the country more varied, with pagodas, here and there the piles of which are buried in the water, and with the ruins of ancient cities whose gray tints are lost in the invading foliage.

Without the picturesqueness belonging to the up country rivers, the valley of the Menam, from a commercial point of view, would nevertheless furnish matter for a particularly interesting study, being populous and given over to trade.

I have already said that it is to the forcible depopulation of the valley of the Mekong by Siam that the Menam Valley owes a part of its inhabitants.

Siamese and Laotians are brothers. Both are Thais, and with some slight differences speak and write the same language.

By the side of the native populations we find the Chinese element. Here, as elsewhere, we shall see them holding the purse strings and continually filling their pockets at the cost of the inhabitants among whom they live. While the latter are indolent and very lazy, working only to live, the Chinese lives only

to work, that is to pile up wealth. All the force of his nature, all the means at the disposal of his intelligence tend only to one end, to make money, as the English say. Thus there is no reason to be surprised if he is the master of trade, of gaming, of opium, and of the taxes, exploiting the virtues as well as the vices of the natives, with the good pleasure of the government to which he pays his tithe. Considered as a foreigner, the Chinese is more favoured than the Siamese, merely paying a capitation tax of from three to four ticals every three years, which does not prevent him, however, from lamenting his lot.

The interests of trade attach him to the state, which has no reason to dread his practising piracy. Several years ago, some Chinamen who worked at the Bangkok rice-mill formed secret societies, but were put down and dispersed by the Siamese soldiers, and order was restored. The danger for Siam in permitting the development of the Chinese element is of another order. It is the same always, caused by the invasion of this race when it finds itself in the presence of a population weaker than itself, as is the case in Tonkin,—namely the demoralization of the inferior races, the absorption of all the riches of the country, or the methodical draining off of all its money and the substitution of foreign intelligence for that of the native inhabitants. It is in short the victory of the stronger over the weaker who is in the end utterly devoured.

With the Chinese we experience again the insolent self-sufficiency which we already know, and that intolerable curiosity, which makes the traveller sur-

rounded by them resemble a horse worried by flies. One looks back with regret towards the tranquil and indifferent Thaïs of the up country. The Chinese keep shops of European goods in those large house-boats, bound one to the other, of which the monotonous Menam towns are for the most part constructed. At Pitchaï I make a list of the trifles in one of these boats; namely bottles of olive oil, sweets, drugs, buttonhooks, pipes, scent bottles, bottles of rose-water, straw hats, tin boxes with panels representing episodes of the war of 1870 and France furnishing some new provinces to Germany, cloth, stuffs and small white waistcoats, watch chains, fobs, filters, glasses, umbrellas, saws, wooden cruets, kerosene lamps, cords, gimlets, mats and iron instruments, all German or English, nothing French. The shop-keeper tells me that he sells in six months sixty tchangs' (eighty ticals) worth of goods, or about £650 worth a year. When I ask him why he does not buy French objects he replies: "They are of good quality, but not so cheap as English or German."

Indeed, French commerce on the Menam is practically *nil*. One is glad to perceive a tricoloured flag occasionally, but I would prefer for my part a little less flag and a little more trade, of which there is none at all, or very little. A French bank established at Pa Nam Po was closed two years ago, and even in Bangkok I see only one French shop, provided especially with scents, toilet objects and *articles de Paris*. Whereas there is an almost daily service of fairly large steamers between Bangkok and Singapore, the capital of Siam communicates with Siam only

twice a month by a small steamer of the Compagnie Nantaise, the *Jean-Baptiste Say*. The agents of the Celestial Empire, whom I regard as above all things practical, do not risk trading with Saïgon, because of the red-tape formalities and the high duties. As for us, we are waiting to create important trading companies as in Tonkin, until our capitalists are a little less timorous; and we are allowing other nations to take the place which the geographical position and importance of our colonies ought to make us the first to occupy.

It is the 12th of May before we reach Bangkok, eager to finish our journey, for we are fatigued, and our last stage, in spite of the apparent comfort we enjoyed after the navigation of the Black River, has not rested us. Continual anxieties, the frequent ill-will of the boatmen and the inhabitants, the changing of boats, the delays due to lack of knowledge or false information, the shallowness of the water, the sand-banks and the tree-trunks which are as bad as the rapids, and above all the heat, followed by rains and storms; all these worries, annoyances and difficulties leave behind them unpleasant memories of the Menam.

Our bodyguard is, if possible, more useless on the water than on land. Provided to protect us they come to implore our protection. On May 8th, at Pac Nam Po they complain of having been upset, of having lost all their goods (?) and of having been maltreated by the Chinese, asking us to judge between them.

What took place was this. The Chinese here have the monopoly of tobacco, and as a good deal of

toll-station at Pac Nam. Now the tax collectors rang three times to stop the Siamese boat. As the latter continued on its way without taking any notice, the toll-boat set out in pursuit, overtook it, and in colliding upset it.

As for us, suddenly called on to become judges, we have only to declare our complete incompetence, and to wish "bon voyage" to the soldiers (whom, indeed, we have never seen since), warning them, however, that if they worry us again, it is from us that they will get another bath.

At Pac Nam we fall in with two Europeans, a Dane and an Englishman, who are leaving the Menam to ascend its tributary the Meping (Menam Laheng, as it is called by the boatmen) to traffic in teak. We pass the evening together talking of the country we have just passed through. The Dane, after having remained for five years in the Siamese army as an instructor and officer, disgusted at not being able to make good soldiers out of his men, has given up his post, and is now in the teak trade. The wood is sold in bulk. A log or trunk of thirty-five to forty feet in length and about three feet thick, is sold for forty ticals. It is floated down at high water, the rafts on the Meping being constructed at a spot about ten days above Pac Nam. Teak is certain to disappear from Siam in a near future, and it will then have to be purchased, as we are told, on the Mekong, in the direction of Paklay and Nam.

With reference to the Mekong, my interlocutor tells me that he has passed through Luang Prabang on his way to Cambodia. According to him there is very little trade to be carried on upon the Upper Mekong,

means of communication being difficult, and the people having no money.

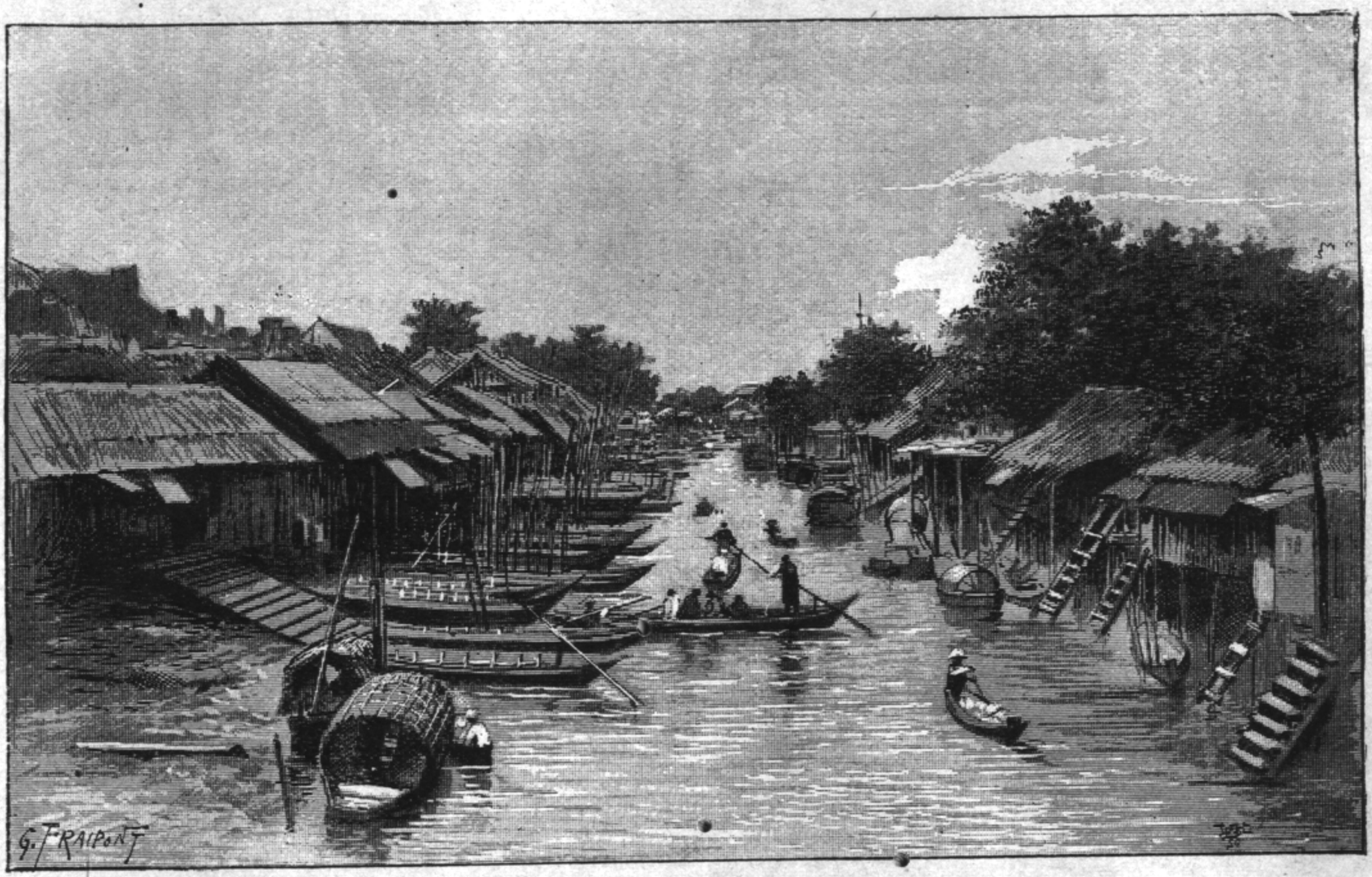
After taking leave of our two acquaintances, we try in vain to close our eyes, for we are quite helpless before an invading cloud of mosquitoes.

Three days later, we reach, in the middle of the night, Ayuthia, the ancient capital, still famous for its monuments and its palace, the Versailles of the King of Siam. Our Chinese boatmen have rowed seventeen hours at a stretch, this amount of work being due to the mode of payment adopted. During the entire descent of the Menam I promise our men a premium in inverse proportion to the time employed in accomplishing the journey. This system stimulates them and has good results.

In spite of the dangers that we were led to fear from pirates, we have seen not the slightest trace of them.

The canals of Ayuthia are encumbered by a flotilla of small steamers, so without losing time we go from one to another, waking the firemen, until we have found one who will agree to take us at once to Bangkok.

We are soon successful, and here we are at last on our way, hurrying down by the light of a superb moon. Stretched on the poop I see only the great trees on either side, and I experience the delicious sensation of being carried, quickly, tranquilly, and alone, across a great forest. I remain for some time awake, to follow the woods as they seem to run behind us, and describe strange curves and spirals like a ribbon which has got into a tangle.




A CANAL AT BANGKOK.


LIBRARY

of our journey, and in spite of the pleasure of receiving home news, I cannot help feeling a certain sadness, something analogous to what a falcon must experience when, having been loosed in the hunt, returns to his master's hand to be put again beneath the hood.

The petty embarrassments, annoyances, pettinesses, conventional obligations of civilised life, with its atrocious uniformity, are now to be taken up once more, and with these *ennuis* the monotonous droning of the same sounds, the same stories.

At nine o'clock, Bangkok. I stayed there three days. Needless to expect of me a description of this great town, which I will qualify as *rastaquouère*. It thinks itself distinguished and elegant, simply because it has hidden its origins and its local colour under the trappings of the first European civilisation which lay within its reach. It is the history of one of those little Japanese *mousmès*, who thinks to become French by throwing aside her *Kimono* in order to dress in the Paris style. She loses her nationality without gaining a new one. She is no longer anything at all.

Its deep canals, where the sun-light plays upon the water across the foliage of the trees; its floating population; its large rivers furrowed by steamers, tugs, merchant boats, and yachts; its numerous pagodas, sometimes purely Siamese, sometimes borrowed directly from the Hindoo style; the altars on which you find, beside the Hindoo linguam, paper flowers under glass globes or crystal balls; its marble statues rudely representing Englishmen in pantaloons and tall hats,

palace with its oriental roof; the marble staircases, the chandeliers, the gilded decorations, the spacious galleries where foreign ministers are received, near the stables in which are lodged, cared for, served, adored as gods the so-called white elephants; the great stone barracks in front of which little soldiers parade in European dress; the tramways and cabs which carry you across fine and spacious streets with shops on well-constructed bridges to the native quarters, where one can get about only on foot among winding alleys, which form the centre of the native commerce, with gaming houses and houses of prostitution; the population itself, composed of a small number of Europeans—English, Danes, Germans and French—of Siamese, Chinese, Annamites, Malays and Hindoos, wearing the most varied dresses: all these sights and sounds contribute to make Bangkok one of the strangest, one of the most heteroclite towns, that I have seen in the far East. It is a curious object to study. Some parts in themselves are beautiful and picturesque under the proper light. But the whole leaves the impression of a great picture, composed by painters of every school, where each artist has followed his individual bent. It is an orchestra without a theme, in which each player indulges his own fancy, a cacophany.

Such is the impression left upon me by Bangkok. The town is well known, and has been often described. It is so easy to get there now that the trip is a pleasure trip, a bridal tour. Amidst its incoherence it includes some curiosities of the first order, even some *chef d'œuvres*, one of which deserves to be better known. This is the Vishnu of the museum, but I leave the description of it to others.

From Bangkok a royal yacht takes us to the island of Kosi Chang, situated at the mouth of the Menam. This is one of the king's summer residences, and it is here that he receives me. I have nothing but thanks to express for his kind reception, as well as for the conduct of the Siamese governors along the Menam. I think that I ought to take this opportunity of replying to a reproach constantly brought against me since my departure by the English press of Siam. It has expressed surprise because, after having been well treated by the Siamese Government, I protested against the encroachments of the latter in the direction of the Mekong. It has called me ungrateful, ignorant of the laws of hospitality, and a stripling, and has applied to me other titles not less flattering. I am anxious to thank the Siamese Government for its conduct towards me. I shall preserve pleasant memories of the personal relations I had with the governors, the ministers, and the king; their amiability and their politeness were assuredly dictated by a feeling of courtesy, to which I am glad here to render homage. But I hope, for their sake, that in practising towards me as largely as possible the laws of hospitality, they did not for a moment do me the insult to imagine that in return I should conceal from my compatriots what I had been able personally to discover during my journey: namely the advance of the Siamese towards our possessions, the occupation, in defiance of all right, of Annamite territories, the bad treatment inflicted on many of our fellow-citizens, the flagrant violation of treaties.

I spoke of what I knew. I cried "*gare!*" ("beware!") and do not regret having done so; and it is at once

until justice is done us; that is to say until the whole of the territories stolen from our *protégés* is restored to them.

We have rights. They must be fully recognised, without tergiversation, without compromises, without concessions. And I know no juster echo of our claims, no criterion more certain, no applause more sincere than the attacks of the Bangkok as well as of the London press; because for the most part abroad, and particularly in the far East, when the Englishman protests, it is because we are in the right, our interest being usually opposed to his own. And it is by not letting our ears be deafened by the frantic cries uttered that we shall ensure for France in the China seas the place which is due, and that we shall render her great, solid, and respected.

NOTE.—Since these lines were written grave events have passed in Siam. The Government has been justly aroused by encroachments, on the part of our neighbours, which nothing justified. They counted too much on our indifference. The energetic attitude of the cabinet, the boldness and the cleverness of our sailors, the firm and worthy language of the *quai d'Orsay* easily got the better of Siamese pretensions. The court of Bangkok found itself forced to meet our claims. It is never too late to act when the interests and the honour of the country are at stake. In face of the foreigner every personal question must disappear, all party spirit vanish, to give place only to French feeling. Thus we ought all of us to congratulate ourselves on the result recently obtained by the Government in Siam, while at the same time trusting that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, recalling the engagements of his predecessors, recorded in the English blue books, may preserve towards London and Pekin the same attitude that he has taken towards Bangkok, whenever the questions pending between the three Powers in the Upper Mekong, above the twenty-third degree of latitude, come up for settlement.

# CHAPTER IX.

## TRADE OF TONKIN.

Geographical position of Tonkin—The routes of penetration: the Red River and its Tributaries—Navigation of the Red River—Commercial Outlets: Yunnam; Articles of Import and Export—Rivalry to be dreaded for our Commerce in the Eastern Markets: the Yangtze Route; Chung King—Burmah Routes—Routes by the Shan States—Commerce with Thibet—The Canton Route by the Sikiong and that of Pakoï by Paisee—Langson Railway—Conclusions—Opinion of M. de Lanessan—Slowness of the Commercial Development of Tonkin: Mistakes of the Government; Mistakes of Individuals—Report of M. Rocher—General conclusion: our future in Asia.

At Kosichang I may regard my journey as finished. After having been received by the king, I embark on one of the Windsor Company's steamers, which takes us in three days to Singapore, where we once more embark upon one of the excellent packets of the Messageries Maritimes.

Before returning to France I desire to take a last look behind me, to add a few words about this superb Indo-Chinese colony of ours of which we know so little. In the first chapters of this narrative I have tried to show what future is reserved for us by the opening up of the agricultural and mining resources

of the country. There remains the question of trade, which I have kept to the end, in order to sketch the main lines of it, as the general conclusion resulting from my reading and from my personal observation during two journeys.

The watchword of Garnier and his successors who with him laid down their lives in the work to which they were devoted, was :

*To penetrate into China. Is it justifiable?*

Open a map of Asia. China, washed by the Pacific for some hundreds of miles, ceases in the south-east to be maritime, and penetrates inland until it touches Indo-China. Lower down, the coast line juts out afresh up to the point of Cochin-China. At the limit of the peninsula and of the Celestial Empire, bathed by the gulf, which marks the end of one bend and the beginning of another, a province runs inland to the north-west, like a wedge driven between the two countries. This is Tonkin, the geographical position of which, upon the slopes of Eastern Asia, like a bung in a barrel, is alone sufficient to render it the point of communication with the richest provinces of China, the port where their products seem to find a natural outlet.

This conclusion, arrived at by a mere glance, becomes inevitable when the map is scrutinized more closely. Tonkin is not only well situated, it has good water communication with routes of direct penetration, perpendicular to the coast, as straight and as clearly marked as if they had been drawn on a map with a ruler.

But this is not enough.

*Is the commerce here worth the trouble already spent upon it? Are fresh efforts justifiable?*

This is what I propose to examine.

To begin with, the Black River must be struck out as impracticable for trade purposes. It is too sinuous, and above Tuen-Quan the rapids render navigation impossible to every sort of vessel except small canoes.

In the west, the Black River cannot be compared to the Red River, rapids abounding in the former, and navigation in the upper waters being often dangerous. Steamboats at present go up only as far as Cho-Bo, and, as I have already said, the small sloop *Le Leygnes*, which the Pavie Mission was able to utilize higher up, was wrecked at Takoa. I went up the Song-Bo and came down the Song-Coï. The one is to the other what a torrent is to a river. The difference of the two water-courses is easily enough defined by mentioning the sort of boats they carry. On the upper Black River only such canoes as we have seen, namely, forty feet long, and carrying at the most three tons, can be used. On the Red River, junks eighty feet long, and carrying nine tons are employed.

Although the Black River issues from a region at present richer and more populous than that washed by the upper Red River, I do not see in the traffic, as now developing, any immediate likelihood of compensation sufficient to make up for the considerable cost of undertaking the works necessary for steam navigation on the Song-Bo. The most that can be done is to blow up a few rocks to permit the passage of canoes, which boats will increase in number, there

being already ten times as many as there were before M. Pavie's trip. The local trade will develop when the higher lands begin to be opened up. The Black River will thus catch a small part of the commerce of Laos and some products (including tea) of the province of Puerh. But I do not feel warranted in supposing that the future here will be different from the past, or that the Black River will ever have an importance approaching that of the Red River.

Before speaking of the Red River I should like to quote the opinions of the authors who have studied the question, from Francis Garnier, the Dupuis, and their successors down to the German Richtofen, the English Hosie, Little, Bourne, Hallett, and the Anglo-Chinese Mesny. They are almost unanimous in praise of the great highway for trade utilized by the Chinese agents—a highway which is now French. Formerly, there were only results to show in support of this, but these, it is true, were sufficiently convincing. Before the coming of the Black Flags the Lao Kay Custom House contributed to Annam £178,320.

Now we have more than mere deductions, for the navigability of the Red River, which, as Doctor Pichon notes,[1] is of the highest interest to the future of Tonkin, has been minutely studied.

There are reports by Lieutenant Le Prieur, by Commandant Bugard, by Lieutenant Lapied, by Engineer Getten for the State, and by engineers of the *Messageries Fluviales de Tonkin* on behalf of private enterprise. But one fact, which has, more than volumes of writing, strikingly and definitely

solved the question of the navigability of the Song-Coï, is that about the middle of 1889 a steamer of the *Messageries Fluviales*, the *Lao Kay*, ascended in sixty hours from Hanoi to Lao Kay. Since then the attempt has been often renewed and at varying depths of water.

The problem then is solved, and the principle of navigability established. How shall it be turned to advantage? Shall vessels be towed or tugged, or shall sloops of the Oriolle system be used? This is of little consequence, being a question which concerns competent engineers, and the main thing is that a service of steam navigation can be started upon this river.

But it is not merely from the point of view of navigation that the Red River is more important than the Black River; the valley has certain marked advantages over that of its confluent. On the Song-Coï there are no high walls, steep cliffs, or narrow passages, but only rounded low hills, and on the left bank above the juncture of the Claire River, no large tributaries, the water-shed of the two rivers being very close together. In a word there are few great obstacles to be overcome whenever the question of establishing a railway arises.

Note in what terms M. Getten, the engineer, expresses himself on this subject:

"As for the construction of a railway in the valley of the Upper Red River, it is a matter which would meet *with no difficulty;* the soil is healthy and firm; there are no long bridges or tunnels to be made; there would be no difficulty in laying the foundation of the various works, and the materials of construction are

abundant. Once the question of natural, and especially artificial, obstacles which have to be met on Chinese territory in order to penetrate into Yunnam is perfectly understood, the construction of a railway line from the sea to Lao Kaï may be dealt with within six months at the longest, and without the slightest danger of failure."

A minute study of the question of a railway from the coast to Lao Kaï is necessary; and if the conclusions are favourable, the construction should not be delayed.

There has been talk of establishing a tow path along the river, and it certainly would be useful. But if we are to go to any expense it is better to incur the necessary sacrifice, so as to obtain a complete and definite result. "Roads," Lord Dufferin has said, "are a constant source of expense; a railway ends by bringing in money."

The question of a railway to Lao Kaï has come up more than once. In March 1887 M. Chailley-Bert announced definitely that the contracts were to be put out for this line, which was to be completed in two years, but so far, however, we have had to content ourselves with words. Nothing, so far as I know, has been done even in the way of a preliminary survey of the country.

The taking over of Tonkin was only the first step towards the penetration of China. The second must now be taken, and this means the establishment of a steamboat service and the construction of a railway line. Let it not be said that one mode of transport excludes the other, for look at Burmah, where a line has been laid down parallel with the Irawaddy and

the new line, despite the rivalry of the river traffic, already brings in more than any of the Indian railway lines.

*Is the trade here worth the efforts already expended? Are fresh efforts justifiable?*

What have we to gain by getting to Lao Kaï rapidly and cheaply?

Supposing our goods to be up from the unloading port to Lao Kaï in two days, a thing which has already been proved possible, they would find an immediate market. They could enter Yunnam and Kouangsi, might even reach Setchuen and Kouitchou. Here they would have fifty millions of possible consumers.

To go from Lao Kaï to Yunnam-Sen takes only from thirteen to fourteen days. The capital of Yunnam would, therefore, be only sixteen days from the great port of Tonkin. At present it takes from fifty-one days to one hundred, according to the route chosen in this or that part of China.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| From Shanghai to Yunnam-Sen, | by the | Yang-Tze, | 90 | days |
| From Canton | — | — Paï Sec, | 68 | — |
| From Pakoï | — | — Nanning, | 51 | — |
| From Moulmeïn | — | — Xieng Houng, | 65 | — (about) |
| From Rangoon | — | — Bhamo, | 75 | — |
| From Haïphong | — | — Red River, | 35 | — at present |

Its position at the meeting of a number of trade routes gives Yunnam-Sen a great importance.

The chief export articles of Yunnam which would take the Red River route are: copper (to the extent of more than 500 tons a year); tin (nearly 3,000 tons a year); opium, the exportable surplus of which

is valued at 3,000,000 taels (about £720,000) and Puerh tea, the annual export of which amounts to more than £160,000. Part of the trade in the last article, however, may take the Black River route.

As for imports (by way of Tonkin) the province will take cotton, and I mention it first, because it is this product, perhaps, which — more perhaps even than coal—is destined to be the future wealth of Tonkin. Neither Yunnam nor Setchuen produce cotton, importing it from the neighbouring provinces, Setchuen to the amount of nearly £1,000,000 per annum. In 1891, according to the statistics of the Mungtze customs houses, cotton was imported to the amount of £18,000. It comes to Yunnam from Burmah, the Shan States, Siam, and the Province of Canton, and according to Hallett, cotton bought at Xienghay for Yunnam-Sen has to be transported for six weeks before it reaches that place, at a cost of £80 per ton.

By way of the Red River a ton of merchandise costs only £18 10*s.* even now from Hanoï to Yunnam-Sen.

On the other hand, cotton comes from Burmah in seventy pound bales, is stored at Tenné and Tong-Tchong, whence it goes to Tali in sixty pound bales, and is thence sent on to Houi-li-Tcheou (western Setchuen). At Tali, it is worth eighteen taels per hundred pounds, say about £36 a ton. The route from Yunnam-Sen to Houi-li-Tcheou being more direct than that *viâ* Tali, it is easy to see with the figures under one's eyes the important place which, in Yunnam and Setchuen, the raw cotton exported from Tonkin must occupy.

As for spun cotton the inhabitants buy more than £400,000 worth of it. And we shall also be able to sell garments and cloth stuffs, while we can take the place of Setchuen and Burmah in their export of silk to Yunnam, and of Setchuen and Canton in that of tobacco. Salt will be one of our most important articles of trade, but of that I shall have something to say below.

Some figures will give an idea of the movement of trade from Yunnam.

To the north over the route from Yunnam-Sen to Sutchou (on the Yangtze) the trade movement through a single custom house is £800,000 per annum.

To the east, over the route from Pai-See to Canton and Pakoï, there went out in 1888 about £560,000 worth of opium, £80,000 worth of tin, and £320,000 of other articles, making in all about £960,000. An equal amount of cotton, cotton goods and other articles entered Yunnam, so that the total trade amounted to £1,920,000.

To the west, even for tea alone the Puerh trade amounts to £160,000, and farther on the Tali trade with Burmah reaches half a million sterling.

From these examples the reader may judge of the immense commercial future which lies within our reach in a province scarcely yet recovered from the ravages of the Mussulman war. And what will be the case when native labour placed within reach of the European engineer, after he has explored the sub-soil, has revealed to the astonished world in the Chinese *hinterland* a new California. Merely in reading the random notes of travellers one is astonished at the prodigious subterranean wealth

of Yunnam. It would seem as if nature had chosen this province in which to fashion, as in a crucible, the mineral products with which it has endowed the old continent. From the ruby mines of Tengyueh, where the Chinese used to send ruined mandarins who were still in favour to fill their pockets, from the copper mountains which astonished Garnier, to the immense coal fields over which we passed when descending to the capital, and to the inexhaustible stores of tin of which Dr. Pichon has recently told us, after Rocher, after Dupuis, everywhere are to be found fresh beds and strata, each richer than the other.

"The markets of the East," said the *Times*, speaking of this portion of China, "are the markets of the future."

And in this the *Times* only echoed the opinion of the English Chamber of Commerce.

But here arises a new question to which it is worth our while to reply.

*What are the routes which the English favour in rivalry to the French roads of penetration into China?*

*How far should we pay any attention to these rival routes?*

There are, in the direction of the outlets which we are considering three other routes besides that of the Red River: the Yangtze route; that of Burmah and the Shan States, the latter directly open to England; and the Canton, or Pakoï, route by way of Paisee.

The Yangtze Route.—It was opened to English commerce by the supplementary article of the Convention of Che-Fou on March 31st, 1890, according

to which: "English and other merchandise may freely circulate as far as Chung-King, after having paid entry dues at Shanghai."

A town of more than 200,000 souls, situated at the junction of the Yangtze and one of its tributaries which comes from the centre of Setchuen, through some of the richest provinces of China, Chung-King is destined, if only because of its position, to become one day, if I may use the English expression, the Liverpool of the East, the great emporium of the Chinese *hinterland*.[1]

At present the steam navigation of the Yangtze stops at Ichang, and the Chinese Government has promised the European powers that it shall be extended as far as Chung-King, as soon as possible. From Ichang to Chung-King in junks is a matter of twenty-five days, and from Chung-King to Sutchéou, in smaller vessels, of fourteen.

Suppose again Lao-Kaï reached from the coast in two days, which, I repeat, may be accomplished whenever we please, the port of Tonkin will then be sixteen days from Yunnan-Sen, twenty-three days from the Yangtze,[2] and twenty-nine days from Houi-li-Tcheou, one of the large towns of south-western Setchuen. This route, by way of Yunnan-Sen, Luhenghay (on the Yangtze) and Houi-li-Tcheou, is taken by the caravans which bring Burmah and

[1] According to Little, Western China contains one-third of the population furnished by Shanghai.

Hosie says, that the annual exports of Chung-King would amount to £5,000,000 sterling.

[2] I crossed from Houi-li-Tcheou to Lunghay (on the Yangtze) in six days, and thence to Yunnan-Sen in seven days.

Laos cotton and European articles to Setchcou carrying back tea and opium. It depends only upon us to turn aside this current from a longer route and to direct it upon Tonkin, feeding this region entirely ourselves.

From Shanghai to Chung-King takes at present thirty-five days, and it is clear in spite of the difficulties put in the way by the Chinese Government, and in spite of the natural obstacles which Hosie sees in the swiftness of the current, rather than in the shallowness of the stream, that Chung-King will one day be reached by steamers. This admitted, let us see what our commercial situation at Lao-Kaï will be.

Let us conceive the great town of the Yangtze and our Tonkin depôt as being the two eastern extremities of a rectangle drawn upon the map and embracing Yunnam, half of Setchuen and a portion of Thibet; and take two articles of the same sort and the same intrinsic value; the one having arrived at Lao-Kaï, the other at Chung-King. The former has been carried for two days instead of sixteen on a steamer,[1] and will have paid fourteen times less freight than the second; consequently in being sent from Lao-Kaï northward, or north-westward, or westward, it will have a start of fourteen to one over the object sent from Chung-King to the south or south-west.

In making this supposition, I have moreover, not taken into account three advantages which our position at Tonkin gives us, but which are not to be overlooked.

1. Obviously, the cost of freight should be less

[1] The minimum.

from France to Tonkin, than from France to Shanghai, and much less than from England to Shanghai.

2. The situation of Lao-Kaï on French territory at the very gates of the Celestial Empire will give the Chinese merchant a market where he may satisfy his requirements gradually, without accumulating a stock of goods, weighed down with heavy duties, which he cannot get rid of.

3. Most important of all,—we can send to China the agricultural and industrial products of Tonkin. Cotton threads for instance, and stuffs made in our colony will have, over similar products of Bombay and Calcutta, to mention only the nearest points of English industrial activity, the double advantage of being within easier reach and of being turned out more cheaply, while it must not be forgotten, that we have coal on the spot.

And I make no mention here of the numerous industries, the natural outlets of which would be the frontier provinces of Tonkin.

Assuredly the time is distant, if indeed it ever comes, when the products of Tonkin will possess, by the disappearance of freight charges to the far East, a sufficient saving over European or even Indian products to be able to compete with them in the north or even the east of Chung-King, in the most populous district of eastern Setchuen.

But, on the other hand, we need not be frightened at the efforts of the English. For on the upper Yangtze the coast is clear. We have only to follow their example and enter into competition with them in these regions.

This has been understood by a group of French

merchants, who, encouraged and aided by the advice and patriotic zeal of M. Haas, our consul at Han-Kou, Ichang, and Chung-King, are about to found a *comptoir* in the large town of the Upper Yangtze and make our industry known as far as the borders of Thibet.

May a deserved success crown their useful undertaking, and may they thus serve in the best way, possible, that is in a practical and peaceful one, the cause of France in the far East.

To sum up, the Yangtze route, which I may style the route of *lateral penetration*, need not alarm our merchants, for, on the one hand, it cannot advantageously compete with the Red River route in the region of Yunnam, and, on the other hand, being open also to our commerce, it will afford full facility if need be, for the expansion of French trade, in the provinces on the left bank of the great stream.

The Burmah Route.—This route, the route of *ascending penetration*, is, in the nature of things, much less to be feared than the preceding one.

When the English seized Upper Burmah they were disappointed at finding that the upper courses of the rivers could not be made much use of for navigation.

The route from Bhamo to Tali by way of Tengyueh, although so short (295 miles) had to be given up. The natural obstacles resulting from the fact that it crosses high mountain chains and deep valleys would have required too much labour and money to render it practicable. The same thing was true of the routes from Mandalay to Tali by way of Theabau and from Hlinedet to Xiengboung through Mongé. It

was necessary to abandon Upper Burmah as a starting point, and try to enter China through Siamese and Shan territory.

THE ROUTE ACROSS THE SHAN STATES.—This left as the best available route that which had been followed by all the caravans from Moulmeïn or Rangoon to Xieng-Mai, and thence to Xieng-Houng, the Golden Road of Colquhoun. They had no longer, it is true, the satisfaction of sending the products of India into the very heart of China without quitting English territory, this, however, being a mere matter of sentiment, and of little importance compared to dollars and rupees. Moreover, were there not ways of making things pleasant all round? Might they not protect this poor King of Siam, isolated as he was in the presence of the French brigands? Had not Hallett, moreover, advised his being taken by the hand and introduced into the great British family?

As for the Shan States declared *independent* in 1882 by Colquhoun, who feared French influence, it would not be difficult, once Burmah had been taken, to recognise the mistake. An understanding could be come to in the south with Siam, and in the north with China. They could be promised support against aggression, and advised to make up for their losses by action in the East against France which can put up with anything. The end would be gained, and then the railway line recommended by the Chamber of Commerce, and by Colquhoun, and mapped out by Hallett might be quietly constructed. The day would come when the locomotive, starting from Rangoon and passing through Xienghoung, would drain the riches of

Yunnam, leaving far on the right petty French Tonkin, and end by bringing its wealth of merchandise to the docks of Chung-King. Thus would be fulfilled the hope of the Anglo-Indian Chambers of Commerce, who have conceived this great idea, and who are working with the tenacity of the Anglo-Saxon race at the colossal enterprise of linking Calcutta to Shanghai across the Celestial Empire.

The race between us and the English has begun, the goal being the markets of South-Western China. The starting signal was given on the one hand by the taking of Tonkin, and on the other by that of Burmah. We are from every point of view ahead. We are so far well in advance, in regard to geography, time, and distance, and there is no reason why we should not win in a canter. But there is no time to be lost, and over-confidence, preventing practical action, would be fatal to our interests. Our rivals are alert and alive to the magnitude of their task, so we must be up and doing.

Having endeavoured to lift a corner of the veil of the future, I return to the present. From Moulmein to Xienghoung, a distance of 625 miles, is a journey of about two months for a caravan, and from Xienghoung to Stemao one of twelve days, that is, about seventy days from a Burmah port to Stemao. It is nearly the same for Tali.

Now from Haïphong to Laïchau it takes from twenty-one to twenty-two days, and thence Ibang, which is the centre of tea growing, and the starting point of most of the caravans that lay in their stocks for the Shan countries, for Tali or for the Yangtze, is reached in seventeen days by easy stages.

From Laï to Stemao is eighteen days, and from Stemao to Xienghoung eight days.

From Laï to Tali by two good roads, much frequented by the caravans, is from twenty-eight to thirty days, that is to say :

From Haïphong to Ibang, thirty-nine days ;
From Haïphong to Stemao, thirty-nine days ;
From Haïphong to Xienghoung, forty-seven days ;
From Haïphong to Tali, fifty days.

Coming down the Black River, the voyage would would be less by a fortnight.

If we suppose Lao-kaï reached in two days, and the route which at present connects Laïchau and Mungtze, directly linked to Lao-kaï, Haïphong would be only ten days' journey from Laïchau.

Whether the traders from Ibang, Puerh, and Stemao take the Black River route or that of the Red River, it will still be on the Tonkin coast that they will find their nearest port. It remains for us to take advantage of this fact by providing products for the numerous caravans which follow the trade routes of these regions, and by inducing them in turn to come to us.

TRADE WITH THIBET.—Our trade connections may also extend beyond Puerh and Stemao westward to Tali-Fou and Upper Burmah. The Thibetans annually descend to Tali for the great fair of the third quarter moon, and they then push on as far as Puerh to buy tea. Would not this be an opportunity for us to exchange some of our products for theirs ? We might give them rice, blue and white Canton cloth, cotton, spun

cotton, porcelains, needles, gray or red silks, &c., and receive in exchange those Thibetan stuffs which, when coarse, are known in Chinese as *Montsé*, in Thibetan as *Laoua*, and when fine are called *poulou* by the Chinese and *tchro* by the people of Thibet; woollen belts, plants for dying borax, rock bees-wax, hides, musk, felt, gold [1] (worth sixteen, eighteen or nineteen times its weight in silver), rhubarb, the fine horseshoe rhubarb, fetching on the spot only a few centimes the pound.

For my own part I believe that a great future is in store for the valley of the Upper Mekong above Tali. It is rich in remunerative products, and the climate is good. The missionaries in their experiments more to the west at Bonga have proved that all European products thrive there. As this natural wealth increases it must follow the main currents, eastward by the Yangtze and to the south-east through Tonkin. Finally in western Yunnam we may substitute our products, silks for instance, for those which the caravans come three times a year to fetch in Yunnam-Sen and take down to Burmah by way of Iong-Tchang-Fou or Ten-Ne-Tcheou.

THE CANTON AND PAKOI ROUTES THROUGH PAISEE.—I have described the efforts of the English in the north and west to penetrate Yunnam by the lateral or ascending routes. I have sought to show that in spite of their keen desire, which they do not conceal, to divert from Tonkin the current of trade

[1] The Upper Mekong valley seems very rich in gold. It is the same throughout Western Setchuen. In one district that I traversed, a nugget of fifty-four pounds was found. In one year 1,500 Chinese pounds of gold were extracted.

which would naturally pass that way, we have no reason to fear them provided we act instead of sleeping on our laurels.

Let us turn now to the East.

A great route much frequented by the Chinese, and in particular by the people of Canton, feeds in this direction Quang-Si and Yunnam. It is the route which from Yunnam-Sen or Mungtze goes to Paisee and Nanning, and thence southwards to Pakoï, or eastwards by Si-Kiang to Canton. From Canton to Paisee by water is a matter of thirty-five days, including loading and unloading, and from Paisee to Yunnam-Sen by land twenty-three days, making a total of fifty-eight days. From Pakoï to Lu-Wushu is five days by water; thence to Nan-Shing is three days by road; from Nan-Shing to Paisee, by way of Naming, is twenty days by water, in all fifty-one days. This plain statement of distances is enough to show that the eastern cannot compete with the Tonkin route for the Yunnam trade, and can barely provide goods for a part of Kouang-Si. Lung-Cheou on our frontier is only six to nine days from Nanning. Now Bourne in his report, which no one will be inclined to think partial towards us, says that the larger part of the commerce of Kouang-Si must pass through Pakoï. "But," he adds, "if a railway were constructed to Tonkin, going to the eastern frontier nearly as far as Lang-Cheou, *this state of things would be altered.*" The English Consul thinks that the Viceroy of Canton will not be so ill-advised as to let us make a railway before he himself has made one from Pakoï to Nanning.

The forecasts of Mr. Bourne have not been realized.

The railway from Langson is about to be completed, the line will be transformed from a gauge of two feet to one of forty inches, an alteration which at the start might have been avoided, but which will provide the administration with Decauville stock capable of being used elsewhere. I need not repeat my former criticism of the construction of this line, nor even ask if it would have been more practicable to have constructed another line at first. It is enough for the moment to know that the Langson railway will be pushed on up to the frontier near to Lang-Cheou. Now, to my knowledge, the Viceroy of Canton has constructed no line above Pakoï. In a very near future the commerce of Nanning, and therefore of half of the Kouang-Si is destined to fall into our hands.[1]

Already the trade between Lang-Cheou and Tonkin is valued by our Consul at about 300,000 taels, nearly £80,000. The town is destined to become the great frontier depot of Kouang-Si.

From the above considerations thus briefly stated these conclusions appear to me to follow :—

*The great commercial future of Tonkin lies not so much to the right in Kouang-Si, or to the left in Laos, as above it in Yunnam.*

*Across this province our commerce must develop in three directions : westwards towards the rich districts of Ibang, Stemao, and Puerh, and beyond up to Tali-Fou, that is to Thibet ; northward towards*

[1] The freight charges per picul of merchandise, which at present are four piastres from Pakoï to Nanning, will be reduced to one and a half from Haïphong to Lang-Cheou, when the railway is completed.

*Yunnam-Sen, and beyond Lunghay, the Yangtze, and Houi-li-Tcheou, into south-western Setchuen; eastward towards Quong-Nan-Fou, namely, the populous region stretching across three provinces, Yunnam, Kouitchou, and Kouang-Si.*

*The main rational and practical route for the French to penetrate into China is that of the valley of the Red River, at the extremity of which are situated two depots; Lao-kaï on French territory, and on Chinese territory Mungtze.*[1]

*It is the shortest and best route from the coasts to the capital of Yunnam.*

While there is unanimity in recognising the Red River route as the shortest, some authors have refused to recognise the use which may be made of its valley even from the point of view of the navigability of the river. They have even expressed some doubts as to the possible value of the trade to be developed. Among this number is to be counted M. de Lanessan.

"Little by little," he wrote in 1889, "the illusions that were held some years ago on the importance of Tonkin as a means of getting to China are being dissipated. We begin to see that the Red River is a *very bad way of penetration into Yunnam*; that the portion of Yunnam bordering upon Tonkin is not so rich as it was formerly thought to be; that the Lang-son route towards Quang-Si can hardly compete with that of the Canton River and its tributaries, and that the real source of prosperity for Tonkin is, as in lower Cochin-China, the Delta rice-fields."

In the course of my remarks I have, it seems to me, met these objections fairly enough. The most

[1] Two days from the river.

convincing testimony, however, is to be had in the foreign books which can scarcely be regarded as partial towards us, and in the efforts of the English to divert off from Tonkin to their own profit a trade which they would not covet if they thought it of so little importance.

Far be it from me to suppose that Tonkin itself, its mines, its rice-fields, and its 12,000,000 consumers should be neglected, in order to consider merely the problem of how to penetrate into China. But the development of Tonkin is in no way incompatible with the desire to develop a more distant commerce.

Assuredly I agree with Colquhoun that the regions of Puerh and Stemao are now richer than those of Yunnam, whence the Song-Coï issues before reaching our territory. Nevertheless, it is on our southern frontier that are found the beds of copper and tin. The plains of Mungtze, Tunghay, and the shores of lake Yunnam-Sen, which I crossed, are open for a cultivation of a most remunerative kind.

The regions which Colquhoun regards as richer than those bordering the Upper Song-Coï ought, as I have tried to show, to form part of our zone of commercial influence.

Without repeating the arguments already developed, are not the figures themselves the most eloquent reply to the fears of M. de Lanessan?

The traffic of the Red River develops from year to year. The trade of Hong Kong amounted to—

£203,415 in 1890,
199,800 ,, 1891,
320,000 ,, 1892,

yet this represents only about one half of the Mungtze trade. In this town we find in 1890 a trade of 1,104,117 taels, or more than £280,000 ; and in 1891, 1,530,007 taels, or nearly £400,000.

We are still far from the figures given by the custom-houses of North Yunnam and Kouang-Si, and even from those of the Lao-Kaï customs farmed by the Emperor of Annam before the coming of the Black Flags.

The trade of Tonkin with China has not reached the figure which we might hope for. The delays in its development are due to two causes—mistakes of the Government, and mistakes of individuals.

1. *Mistakes of the Government* :—At the very outset, even in the treaty with China, the Anglo-Chinese customs officers, who served as our go-betweens, took care to introduce a clause, which we accepted although it was injurious to our trade, namely the prohibition to export salt from Tonkin to China. Mr. Bourne, in his report, notes the disadvantage we suffer from this prohibition. He says :—

"I think there is no reason to fear any serious prejudice for English interest in the opening of the Red River, *as arranged by the recent treaty*, even supposing a hostile tariff at Hong Kong."

Formerly, indeed, Yunnam and a portion of the neighbouring provinces were provided with sea-salt from Tonkin, and this was the object of important commercial exchanges. The inhabitants of these regions are now reduced to bringing rock salt from North Yunnam. As the English in India have just obtained from China the permission to export tea directly into Thibet (which was formerly done by

contraband), so we might very easily get repealed, or drop, the article of our treaty relating to the prohibition of salt, and our commerce would gain considerably thereby.

By establishing the opium monopoly we have ourselves interdicted its use as money, yet this is the chief article of trade in China, and takes, owing to its slight weight and high value, the place of coin.

According to Bourne, seven-tenths of the exports of Kouang-Si and Kouangtoung to Yunnam are paid in opium.

The government of Tonkin has just re-purchased the opium monopoly. This is a good measure, if the greater part of the duties on this product must be taken off. But the substitution of a governmental protectorate for the system of farming would become absolutely useless were the tariff on opium sufficient to keep up its price at as high a rate as in the past.

The establishment of customs tariffs has diminished the introduction of foreign products without greatly increasing our own. I read some months ago in one of the Tonkin papers that 80 per cent. had been taken off the entrance duties for merchandise in *transit*, and this was a most necessary measure.

The Government has as yet, however, done too little, if indeed it has done anything, to encourage and develop the trade of Tonkin with China.

We did not, I imagine, take a colony merely as an overflow place, to which our superfluous officials could be shunted, but in order to colonise and to trade there.

Let us then imitate a little more our English neighbours, who colonise and trade. When we seized Tonkin, Mr. Bourne immediately received a mission

from the British Government "to make an inquiry on the situation and the trade routes" of this little known region, and "on the probable results which the *commercial clauses* of the treaty recently concluded between France and China would have on *English Trade* with the interior markets of Kouang-Si and Yunnam."

And we, who are most interested, have we done for ourselves what our rivals undertook for themselves to guard against competition? Have we sent out agents in every direction throughout the regions bordering upon Tonkin? Have we organized commercial missions to go to Yunnan-Sen and the Yangtze and to consult the big Chinese merchants, coming to an understanding with them, and gathering definite information? Nothing of the sort. It is to the reports of the English consul that the Devrez, the Pichons, the Wehrungs and so many others who are anxious to let France see what a commercial future we may hope for in China, have to refer; for one really must have other backing than vague notions when one seeks to arouse the interest of timid capitalists. It is only with proofs in hand that one can hope to render popular, by showing certain good results, a conquest still so little known and understood.

It is impossible to come upon the few French documents which exist; they are scattered here and there, buried in archives, forgotten or lost. Questions to the Minister of Marine, inquiries and researches at the Chamber of Commerce are of little use.

"I should have liked," writes Dr. Pichon,[1] "to consult the reports of engineer Getten and Com-

[1] *Un Voyage en Yunnam*, p. 168.

mandant Bugard, but I have searched for them in vain. What a pity that it should be impossible to gain information on so important a subject except after long searches in libraries," and often fruitless.

I may ask, with M. Wehrung, "Why the department of Foreign Affairs has not given publicity to some passages in the very complete reports of M. Rocher?" which, if I may judge by a copy sent me as a personal favour by a friend in Tonkin, are very interesting.

I should like to give them in full, as much because of the opinions expressed as owing to the authority of their author, who is so well-known by his writings and his long experience of affairs in the Far East.

"The Setchuen, Kouitchou and Canton route," he says, "although much longer, will continue to furnish their contingent of merchandise, and that will be the case as long as the Red River route, the advantage of which no one questions, is looked upon with so much doubt, and so long as the scarcity of junks, both at Hanoï and Manghao, keeps the price at such a pitch as to be remunerative for the junk owners and outfitters, but ruinous for trade."

The penury of junks arises from the obstacles to navigation in the Red River. The timber suitable for a junk capable of overcoming the obstacles in the river have to be obtained from distant unhealthy virgin forests, the very aspect of which is enough to frighten the workman. While, on the banks of the Yangtze, the boatman always find a living by its trade, population, and ready to encourage commerce and navigation. Along the Song-Coï, on the contrary, there is still considerable risk from pirates.

"The result of this organization" (of the Yangtze) adds M. Rocher, "and the abundance of means of transport make the freight from Ichang to Chung-King much cheaper than from Hanoï to Lao-kaï. And yet the navigation of the Upper Yangtze is far more difficult than that of the Red River.

. . . . . .

The possession of the best land does not suffice to make a man rich, he must know also how to render it productive. Yet if one takes a backward glance, the *Red River is seen to be to-day what it was three years ago; nothing has been done;* the difficulties are the same. "There is no development either of the river service or of the aids to transport, and whatever security there is has been bought at a very dear price. The roving frontier bands exact what they call "a tax against piracy."

2. *Mistakes of Individuals.*—When one marks the slight efforts of the Government to encourage and develop the Red River trade, to render the stream practicable and navigable, or even to study the best route for a railway, one cannot be surprised to find private initiative, thus left so entirely to its own resources, quite behindhand. And yet it is to private initiative alone that are due the few practical attempts to penetrate into Yunnam. The *Messageries Fluviales* have carried their steamers up to Lao-kaï.

It is not that our colonists lack daring and energy. No; the only reproach to be laid at their door, and the defects which throws them so far behind the English and the Germans, is that they do not gather minute and accurate enough information through competent agents as to what should be done.

I know what the answer will be. "It is easy," I shall be told, "to talk about plans and intentions. We are not short of them, what we want is capital."

Yes; money, the primary element of every undertaking, is lacking. And yet the few Companies formed to develop the resources of Indo-China have founded a bank, the statutes and regulations of which are so exacting that it cannot furnish any really efficacious and practical aid even to those enterprises which it may approve. The Bank of Indo-China admits that its regulations do not allow it to play in our colonies any such part as that of the English banks in China.

"The very slightest effort we may make to do business," said one of its clerks to me, "obliges us to twist and turn our regulations inside out, and even, when the business is under way, it is rarely according to the absolute letter of the law."

Why are our capitalists so timorous? Why do we put some hundreds of millions of francs into such enterprises as Panama, promoted by discredited financiers or dishonest politicians, and nothing into affairs at home? This is an economic question, the very complex causes of which it is not for me to try to discover here.

May I only be permitted, in finishing this work to express the hopes which, it appears to me, are its material conclusions.

*The creation of a deep-water port at Honghay or Kebao.*

*A careful survey, to be followed by excavation, of the means for facilitating the navigation of the Red River.*

*An inquiry as to whether the construction of a railway line on the left bank of the river is feasible.*[1]

*Diminution of the duties on transport goods.*

*An arrangement with the Chinese Government permitting the export of salt.*

*Abolition or lowering of the entrance duties on opium.*

*Creation of an establishment of industrial and commercial credit, a sort of* sous-comptoir, *affiliated to the Bank of Indo-China, but capable of undertaking those affairs which the statutes of the latter forbid it to enter upon.*

Once these measures for the development of the trade of Tonkin are taken, the colony will obtain what all our colonies lack—*credit*.

Still unpopular with many people, they suffer from not being looked at in the same light all round. And almost everywhere there exists a latent antagonism, if indeed it is not overt, between the colonist and the Government.

"It is useless to help the French merchant," says the official, "he has no money."

And the latter replies :—

"Why seek capital when all sorts of obstructions are put in one's way?"

Thus they revolve in a never-ceasing vicious circle,

[1] Since the conquest of Upper Burmah in 1886, up to 1891, the English have spent there 2,830,000 rupees on railway lines. They have carried the line which borders the Irawaddy (a metre line of 220 miles up to Mandalay. During the year 1890 the Burmah railways, in the revenue of which the Mandalay branch counts as two-fifths, paid a dividend of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. We are far from having even tried to obtain similar results in Tonkin.

simply because of the primary misunderstanding as to the real ends of colonisation.

This state of things from which we all suffer is not innate in the French character. We are colonisers, and to those who may be inclined to smile I would simply point, to take only one instance, to Canada. But it is an accident due to a confusion. It is for us to break through the circle of routine prejudice, distrust and *chicane* within which we are inclosed.

"You have eyes," said MacCarthy to his compatriots, "open them. Look a little beyond your own neighbourhood, your club, your set, your village."

Look Eastward, I would add. I do not know what Africa may be worth, for I have never been there. I feel sure it includes some regions that are very rich, and I would fain believe that the millions spent on the Congo will one day be restored to us and that Dahomey oils will enrich our merchants. I have the profoundest admiration for all the long list of bold explorers, the Mizons, the Bingers, the Monteils, the Maistres, the Dybowskys, &c., who, with the French flag in their hands, have covered half of Africa with a network of tricoloured lines.

To possess the energy and daring to undertake labours so perilous faith is needful above all else, as was said, some months ago by one of the most fervent believers in the future of Tonkin.[1] Faith in the greatness of the Dark Continent, they have it all of them, but how far they can justify it I cannot venture to say.

But I do know what Asia is, not merely as regards

[1] The reference is to the late M. Jules Ferry.

its past, but also its future; the great river-courses, the blue rivers, the River of Pearls, the Song-Caï, the Mekong; the immense plains of yellow mud which support nearly 400,000,000 of inhabitants; the crops which seem to spring up from an inexhaustible soil needing no manure; the hundreds of miles of villages huddling one upon the other so closely that they form but a single street where the traveller cannot find room even to fix his tent, a people which swarms, multiplies and toils, and is only too anxious to barter and to consume.

It is for us to furnish Asia with our science and intelligence; to be its engineer, its brain. It will give us in return its labour and its raw material: coal and metals, rice and wheat, cotton and the ramie plant.

It is in Asia once again that will be decided the destinies of the world. In Asia will be founded and will increase great empires, and whoever succeeds in making his voice to be heeded in the Far East will be able also to speak in dominating accents to Europe.

Far-seeing men understood the interest France had in planting herself upon the flanks of China. They seized, at the extremity of the old continent, a strip of land on which they might set up a box for the French sentinel at the gates of the Celestial Empire. By a lucky chance this strip of soil was itself rich in resources. It was at the head of the line leading directly to the most populous and one of the most productive empires in the world. By a still happier coincidence this scrap of land proved to be an immense storehouse of coal, thus giving our naval forces the exclusive privilege of complete independence in

comparison with our neighbours when thousands of leagues away from home!

We held all the trumps. We still hold them, and we may win the game with the products of our national industry in the great markets of China.

Do not let us lose them.

Merchants, remember that while French imports into Tonkin amount to only £480,000 for 12,000,000 inhabitants, the direct imports of England into Burmah were, even in 1884, £2,840,000 for only 4,434,000 inhabitants; and that from 1891–92 the foreign trade of Burmah was 250,000,000 rupees.

Remember that Tonkin is richer, three times more populous, and better situated than Burmah.

Remember that Tonkin produces cotton, contains some millions of tons of coal, and is linked to China by the shortest and the best route.

Be Asiatic, there lies the future!

THE END.

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