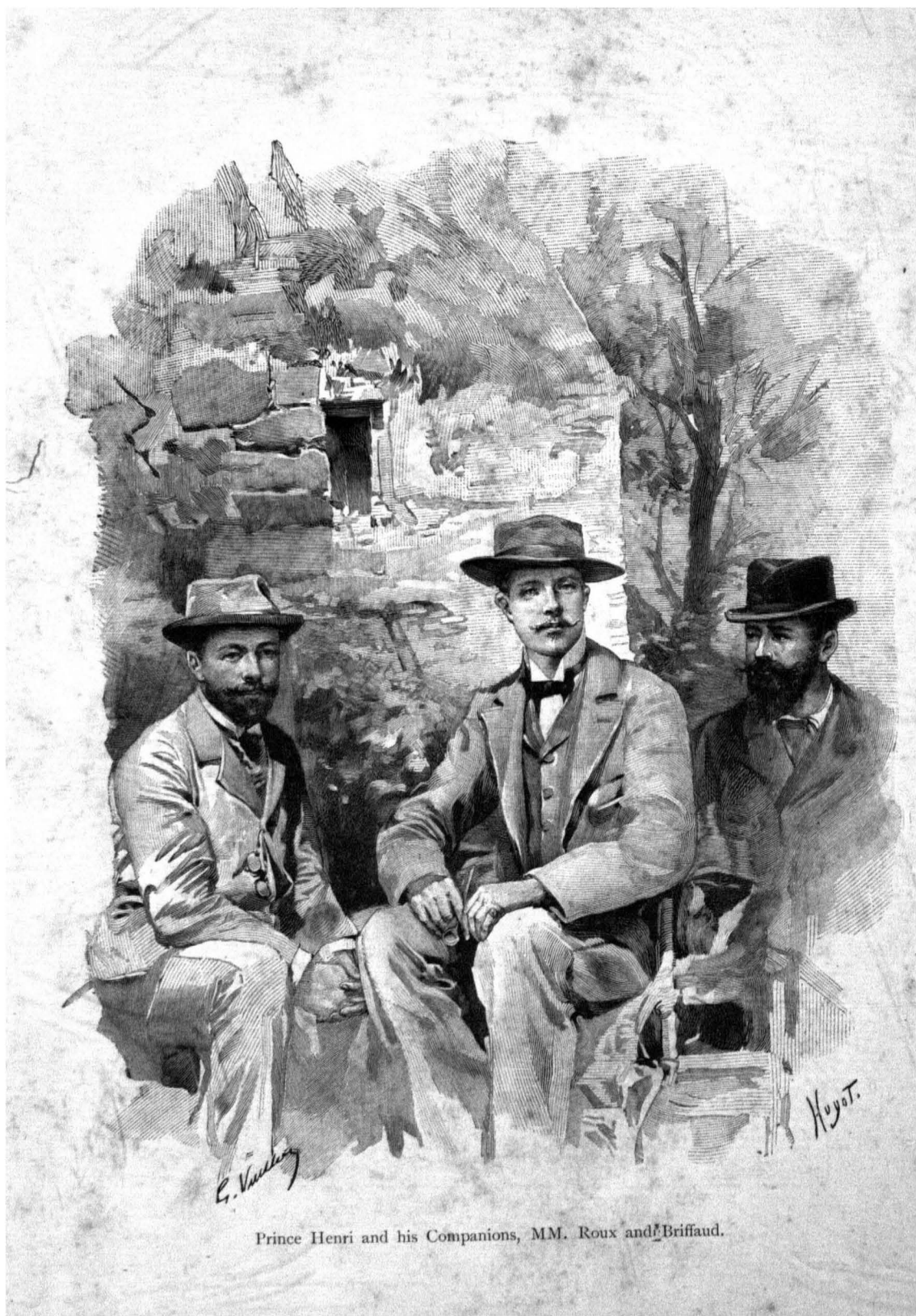


FROM TONKIN TO INDIA

BY THE SOURCES OF THE IRAWADI

JANUARY '95-JANUARY '96



Prince Henri and his Companions, MM. Roux and Briffaud.

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BY

PRINCE HENRI D'ORLEANS

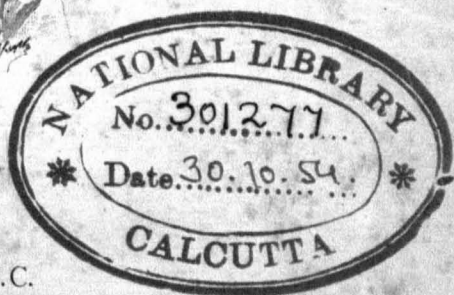
TRANSLATED BY HAMLEY BENT, M.A.

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MAP AND GEOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX

BY

ÉMILE ROUX

ENSEIGNE DE VAISSEAU

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On the Banks of the Red River.

CHAPTER I

HANOÏ TO MONGTSE

My Companions—Plan of Travel—Death of M. de Grandmaison—M. Briffaud—At Hanoï—Final Preparations—Our Men—Ascent of the Red River by Steamer—Yen-Tay—Laokay—By Junk to Manhao—First Difficulties with the Chinese—On to Mongtse—Stay at the Consulate—Situation of the Missionaries—We organise the Caravan—A Walk in the Town—The Market—General Ma—Customs Officials—Life of the Europeans at Mongtse—Climate—The Plague—Food Resources.

ON the 13th of September 1894 M. de Grandmaison and I, having just returned from travelling in Madagascar, picked up M. Roux at Aden, where he had arrived direct from France.

Although his duties as a naval lieutenant had hitherto prevented our personal acquaintance, a correspondence of several

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years had given me an insight into the character and sterling worth of my future comrade, and we were in complete accord both as to the end to be achieved and the means for its attainment. As soon as I expressed my intention of starting on this fresh voyage of discovery, Roux at once decided to apply for leave of absence to accompany me. This was granted by the Minister of Marine for one year, and when we now met for the first time it was as old friends.

Thus it came about that we three found ourselves, full of youth and high spirits, fired with the same enterprise and zeal for our country, chatting over our maps on board the *Saghalien*, eastward bound.

My original idea had been to complete my knowledge of French Indo-China, and especially the mountainous districts of Annam. But these were now almost familiar. The network of such recent journeys as those of the Pavie Mission, of MM. Bonnin, Grill, and Odenthal, and the prospective one of Lieutenant Debay, left but small tracts on the map to be traversed. We turned our eyes farther north, where lay the hitherto unknown course of the Mekong in China. We felt that the work initiated by Lagrée and Francis Garnier ought to be continued by Frenchmen. Moreover, our explorations in China outside our own possessions would enable us to gather information that should be of profit to the peaceful commercial expansion of our colonies. Once up there, it would be idle to retrace our steps. When we should have ascended the valley of the Mekong as far as the point where the French missionaries had established themselves on the Thibetan-Chinese frontier, we should only have to turn to the left and reach India. Map travel is ever easy. The idea of a return through absolutely new countries took my

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companions' fancy; the proposal was carried unanimously, and our plan was made.

After a month or so in Cochin China and Cambodia, in the provinces of Battambang and Angkor, and in Annam, we were to make Tonkin our base of departure. Skirting the northern or Chinese boundary of Tonkin and the Laotian States, we would endeavour to strike the Mekong at the point where it enters Indo-China—that is to say, not far from where Garnier quitted it. Thence we should follow the valley of the river, keeping as near as possible to its stream in order to determine its undefined course in China. Our highest goal was to be Tsekou on the frontier of Thibet. Above Tsekou the Mekong is known through the labours of missionaries. We should halt at Tali Fou, the chief western mart of Yünnan. And for our homeward route we would make the attempt to march due west.

Such were the general outlines of our journey. For an undertaking of this magnitude all available subsidiary chances should be assured. One important factor was uncertain,—time. Roux had only a year's leave; and as this would not suffice, it was imperative that he should be "seconded" for colonial service of indefinite duration. Given this, and resolution, there seemed to be good hope of ultimate success.

But on our subsequent arrival at the rendezvous at Tonkin, in the end of December, sad news awaited us. M. de Grandmaison, who had gone for a week to Hong-Kong whilst we were visiting Hué, was fated never to rejoin us. He had succumbed to a sudden illness. Death, in thus cutting off our comrade, had taken heavy toll of us at the outset. I cannot refrain from rendering brief homage here to the memory of his

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intrepid spirit, who, in the flower of youth, with name and fortune, was willing to throw in his lot with mine, in the hope that he might perhaps some day return to do good work for our colonies.

The void caused by this event only served to bind us who survived more closely to each other and to our task. Roux having at this time received the sanction for his colonial transfer, we two resolved to carry out the original project of the three, and set about our preparations in earnest.

Whilst he proceeded to Hong-Kong to perform the sad duty of embarking the body of M. de Grandmaison, and to consult with M. Desgodins, the well-known missionary of Thibet, besides making various purchases, I remained at Hanoï adjusting baggage and engaging followers.

During these preliminaries a providential accession was made to our little band in the person of M. Briffaud, one of the older inhabitants of the colony, who had passed eleven years in Tonkin. He was on the point of returning to France, but being a pioneer at heart was attracted by our enterprise, and asked to be allowed to join us as a volunteer. I recalled the instance of Father Dédékens, who, six years before, on his way home to Belgium, elected to make a *détour* in our company. And a *détour* it proved, for it lasted a year, and traversed Central Asia and Thibet. But, like Father Dédékens, Briffaud also was gifted with the sacred fire; he was inured to the hardships of travel, and possessed experience, health, and a cheerful disposition. These were more than enough to ensure him a hearty reception as one of ourselves.

On the morning of 26th January 1895 we set out from Hanoï on board the *Yünnan*. Besides our three selves, our party

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consisted of four. The first was a little Annamite, who had been with me before. On the present occasion he did not go far with us; nor did I subsequently regret him: he would never have stood the sort of work we had to encounter. At Yen-Tay he left us sick. The second, Sao, had also previously accompanied me to Bangkok. He was large and angular, of independent temper, and a bit of a grumbler, but withal a safe shot, a sure hunter, and proved himself afterwards eminently practical in an emergency. Sao spoke little, and testified his approbation or derision by a silent smile, which displayed two rows of beautiful black teeth. "Much stupid" was his contemptuous expression for anyone who did not meet with his approval. The very reverse of Sao was Nam, or the Namoi as they called him. He was our cook; a dirty, shrinking, humble, little old thing, who, inasmuch as



Nam.

he was worthy and longsuffering, soon became the butt of the party, and though incessantly chaffed always maintained his good-humour. Poor simple soul, Nam trotted on from country to country, alike unmoved by change of scene or people, with never a question as to whence he came or whither he went, but preparing our food throughout with conscientious regularity. Only when

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tobacco ran short did Nam begin to be unhappy: then, indeed, the situation became serious to him. Nothing was more characteristic of our *chef* than his engagement. One day at Saïgon, we were seeking a cook before leaving for Annam. It was ten o'clock; we started at noon. Someone brought Nam to us. "Are you willing to come?"—"Yes; I will be ready at four." "That won't do; we are off in two hours."—"All the same; I come back." And so, hired at the outset for only a few weeks, the Saïgonnese was attached for many a long month to our retinue. A lofty principle enlightened the breast of this primitive Asiatic, and explained his conduct. Nam was a widower, with three children—three little gnaos whom he adored, and for whose sake he would walk far and work hard to bring back money.

Besides our Annamites (the boys rarely gave their names, and were known by their numbers, "Five," "Six," "Three," etc.), we had with us a Chinese, big and bony, with an oily yellow face, evil, treacherous, and hateful. This was our interpreter, François. He spoke French well, and was furnished with good credentials from officers of the ships on which he had been a cook, as well as from the mines of Hong-Hay, where he had been employed. I found him at Langson, and engaged him at once; for it is difficult to meet with an interpreter in Tonkin who can speak the Chinese of Yünnan, which is the tongue of Chang-Hay, the pure dialect of the mandarins. In the districts we were about to pass, Cantonese would be of no use. Although I had written two months beforehand to Tonkin to secure an interpreter, only one could be shown to me, and he smoked opium so heavily, and demanded such exorbitant pay, and a chair to travel in, that we deemed ourselves lucky to secure François, despite his looks.

We had a great amount of baggage, and were fortunate in

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having the assistance of M. d'Abbadie to escape paying excessive dues. We divided it into two parts—one to take with us, and the other to be sent from Mongtse straight to Tali, as a reserve. In the belief that our experience may be of use to future travellers, a list of the contents of the packages will be found in the Appendix.

We reached Yen-Tay on the 29th January, after a pleasant passage under the escort of two friends. I found it much changed since 1890. The large straw huts had been replaced by stone barracks, some good houses had been built, and a small club erected. I took advantage of our halt to visit the coal pits belonging to M. d'Abbadie, about a mile above Yen-Tay; the workings extend on either side of the river as far as Tray-Hutt. The coal is gaseous, yielding 20 or 30 per cent. of volatile matter, compared with 10 to 15 per cent. in that of Hong-Hay. Traces of petroleum have been found in the neighbourhood, and an engineer is about to take out a concession for graphite.

After a stay of two days we went on board the *Bahoa*, a launch of only a few feet draught. The water was falling, and as this was probably her last trip for the season we arrived only just in time. We took leave of our friends and of the officers who had given us so cordial a reception. From henceforth we should not look upon the tricolor again for a long time, and here we left behind the limits of civilisation to enter upon the freedom of travel. We were eager to get forward, and I was impatient until I should find myself astride a nag, with a pipe in my mouth, seeing things which others had not seen, in strange countries, where the interest of the day cloaked the uncertainty of the morrow.

The ascent of this part of the Red River was not as rapid as we could have desired; we were continually running aground

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upon sandbanks. I could not but admire the address with which our crew of twelve Annamites sprang into the stream and laid out hawsers ahead to haul upon. It took us sometimes five or six hours to gain about a hundred yards. During these checks I employed myself in making washings of the sand of the river, finding in it numerous small garnets.

Owing to this lowness of the water our transit occupied five days between Yen-Tay and Laokay. The latter little town had not altered. Its houses and huts, grouped on the left bank of the Song-Coï, are separated by an affluent of the river, called the Nam-Ti, from the Chinese village of Song-Phong, a regular haunt of pirates and evil-looking gallows-birds. Song-Phong is flanked by a range of hills forming the frontier. The crests dominate the slopes of our side, and are Chinese, capped by our neighbours with a series of forts. On the right bank stood the barrack of Coklen, a quaint building of many roofs placed one above the other like canisters.

At Laokay we received the hospitality of the river agent, M. Dupont, who had been so obliging as to purchase horses for us, and to write to Mongtse for mules. From him we obtained some information about the place. Commerce has scarcely made any advance for several years. The opium farm has been abolished, but the monopoly of the drug with China has been given to an individual, who encumbers the sale with a 10 per cent. profit for himself. Similarly, the pacification of the district is at a standstill. Five years ago one could travel round Laokay with more security than now. Fresh bands had overrun the province. Colonel Pennequin had driven them back into the province of Tulong, half of which belongs to us. The Chinese, objecting to their neighbourhood, requested us to relieve

HANOÏ TO MONGTSE

them of their presence, and, at the intercession of the Tsung-li-Yamen, our troops received orders to dislodge the pirates from the whole of Tulong. Those who troubled us no further now returned into our territory; to counterbalance which, and by way of showing their obligation for our good offices, we had the satisfaction of seeing more than one hundred and fifty Chinese regulars transfer themselves to our enemies. Actually, upon the right bank a band of more than three hundred might be counted. Armed junks constantly patrol the river to guard the navigation. But our troops are tired out: there are not enough of them.

During our stay at Laokay we took part in a hunt which was as curious as it was unexpected. Whilst at breakfast with M. Dupont we saw a sudden stir at the water-side, people running down to the river, and boats casting off as hard as they could. Out we rushed: and here was the cause of all this hurly; a stag, which had innocently descended to the brink, had been viewed and headed back by some soldiers on the right bank. The entire population turned out in pursuit; the waters were churned by a struggling crowd of junks, pirogues or dug-outs, and human beings, all making chase down stream. A light tricolor on the head of the quarry alone was wanting to make the game resemble a 14th July water-frolic. The poor beast did not know which way to turn; it managed to escape a blow from a boat-hook, which only wounded it; it was but to prolong the agony, for some swimmers awaiting it lower down grappled with and finished it. Then came the question as to who was to eat it: every boatman, with a storm of oaths and protestations, claimed it as his own. In the midst of these awakened appetites one felt inclined to pity the animal; but then, "*que diable aussi, allait-il faire en cette galère?*"

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At Laokay we left the steamer. From here we were to proceed in a junk retained for us by M. Dupont. But the boatmen declared, not without reason, that two junks with sixteen men were necessary for such heavy cargoes over some of the rapids. So we had to wait another day and a second junk, and twenty-four hours were cut to waste in this our first encounter with the Chinese. I warned my companions that they would have to lay in a stock of patience before dealing with the Celestial. They soon learned the justice of my remarks.

The mandarin of Song-Phong sent us his card, with a demand that we should pass the custom-house and submit our passports to his scrutiny; adding that he would then furnish us with a guard of soldiers. Our answer was the same to both demand and offer: we were in French waters just as much as Chinese, and wanted nothing.

The morning of the 7th February saw us under way on two junks, each about 80 feet long; the crews were ranged fore and aft, the rudder was formed of large spliced spars, and the waist of the vessel was covered in with hatches. Poling was our chief mode of progression; and this the men performed adroitly and in time. Whenever it served we took advantage of the wind. A huge rectangular sail was hoisted upon a couple of masts, stepped in the shape of an inverted V, to catch the least breeze, for which the men continually whistled. We were told that, dependent on its being favourable or the reverse, the voyage would occupy three days or a fortnight.

Æolus was happily propitious, and we sailed along at a fair pace. The crew was composed for the most part of hybrid Chinese or Mann mountaineers, neighbours of the Thos, and wearing the Chinese pigtail and blouse. I used to chat with them of an evening

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when the boat was tied up for the night. They told me how, away in the interior, beyond Longpo, the inhabitants were hairy, and of others who had little tails, and sat upon seats adapted to their conformation. I had already heard a similar distinction attributed to the Moïs. The conversation drifted into legends, and I inquired if they knew the Chinese story of a country where there were only women. They replied in the affirmative, and added that it was an island in the midst of a lake which none might cross, for the waters of it were so light that a feather cast on the surface would not float. "And that is why," said they, "we have never landed on the woman's realm."

A laughter-loving lot, these boatmen also were hard workers. Although less strong than when I had descended the river at high flood, the rapids still were numerous; and it was necessary at each for the double crews to pass the junks through singly—a tedious operation. The features of the country were monotonous; valleys enclosed by hills, sparse villages. We saw rather more on the afternoon of the 10th February, some days after leaving Laokay. In one bend of the river we discovered a religious monument in the shape of a rectangular column with a niche at its base. Hard by was a small town of bamboo houses, and others white in a setting of large red-blossomed trees. The name of the place was Manhao. Down by the river lay a number of junks, with their grove of A-shaped masts, flying a little flame-like flag or sometimes a cock's tail. On the opposite or right shore appeared a hamlet of thatched one-storey houses, reached by a terrace of stone steps, shaded with fine trees. The site of this place, Lao-Minchang, was fresh and picturesque.

Our men were very pleased with themselves. They had not told us that we were approaching the end of our stage, but kept it

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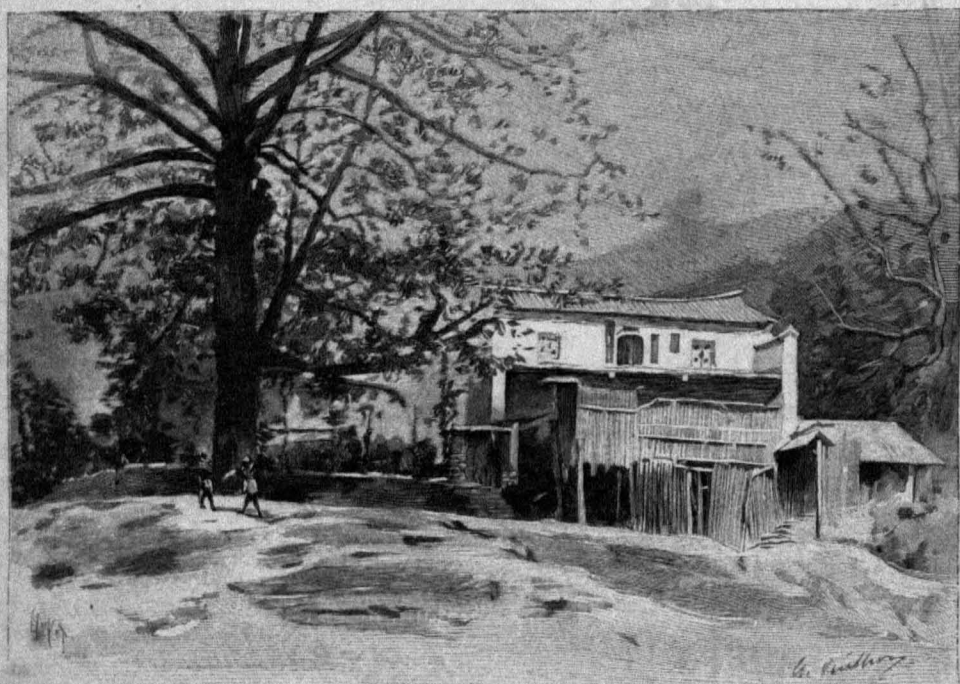
as a surprise. They now offered thanks to their gods for a prosperous voyage by burning strings of crackers. And indeed we had been lucky. We learned later in a letter from M. Dupont that a band of pirates had actually set out with the intention of capturing us and holding us to ransom. They had even provided themselves with grenades to throw into the junks. We owed our safety to our speed.

If we had enjoyed quick progress by water, in revenge as soon as we set foot on land we made acquaintance with those interminable delays which are due to the apathy or the ill-will of the yellow race. We wished simply to pass through Manhao and to push on to Mongtse, where we should be able to engage muleteers, organise our caravan, and forward our reserve baggage to Tali. It took us four days before we could even start. Our first difficulties were with the custom-house. The coolies refused to disembark the loads without authority. The officials insisted on a declaration, which I refused, as our passports for the *Yunnan* dispensed with it. I invited them to come on board: they would not be at the trouble. I threatened them with all the thunders of their chief at Mongtse: they did not seem perturbed. Nor was it until after long hours of discussion that I obtained a permit which was our due, and which they might have issued at once.

We put up at the house of a merchant who spoke French and had been M. Bleton's interpreter. He was a small wizened creature, whose emaciated features and shrunken semi-transparent hands at once told the tale of the baneful opium passion which enslaved him. Nevertheless he rendered us service in settling money matters. We had to arrange for the transport of ourselves and baggage to Mongtse. Our ponies had certainly arrived from Laokay, and proved sturdy and clever; but we now learned that the mules which

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should have met us here were detained by the Taotai. Nor did there seem much chance of finding them. In vain we talked, in the middle of the enclosure which serves as a public square, where the telegraph stood. Big bilious-visaged Chinese lounged about in robes and slippers with pasteboard soles, killing time with talk and smoke; and these effeminate creatures gazed on us with that self-



At Manhao.

sufficient and contemptuous air which meets one everywhere in China, and which we were forced to put up with for many a month to come.

We watched caravans arriving or departing, long processions of draught oxen adorned with red worsted tassels and bells. These cattle made the journey slowly from Mongtse in twelve days. Their load consisted of two sheets of tin weighing about 200 lbs. Mules

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also there were with like loads; I counted no less than one hundred and thirty animals in one morning. Unfortunately, they were not for hire, being under contract to Mongtse merchants to carry tin in exchange for linen, yarn, and fine tobacco for the universal water-pipe. I was struck by the commercial activity going on here. In 1894 the junk-borne tonnage was 5,886 tons. I myself witnessed more than fifty-three cargoes embarking.



Old Hou-Ni Woman.

I asked for statistics from a telegraphist who spoke fair English. At his computation Manhao consists of about two hundred houses. There are seven agents for tin, each of whom receives yearly from two hundred to three hundred consignments of about fifty tablets, about 72 lbs. apiece, at a rate of eighteen or twenty taëls.¹ Mule tariff from Mongtse to Manhao is approxi-

mately one taël, and the transport of fifty tablets per junk from Manhao to Laokay is three taëls. Between Laokay and Hanoi there are more forwarding agents. Thence the tin is shipped to Hong-Kong, where the pieces sell at thirty-five or forty piastres. A large trader of Manhao will send yearly to Mongtse in exchange between ten and twenty thousand bales of Hong-Kong merchandise—yarn, cotton and linen goods, flannel, and tobacco. Salt is the only

¹ One taël = about 5s.

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article of contraband at the Manhao custom-house; the dues are collected at Mongtse. The rock-salt comes down in small boats from the mines situated four or five days farther up the river.

Whilst at Manhao the market was held, which every week attracts the villagers of the surrounding country. The scene was one of great

animation; and we were able to get a glance at many of the hill folk, with their different dresses and dialects, with whom we were later to come in contact. Here was a Poula woman, wearing, Chinese fashion, a mantle with green and red trimming; upon her forehead was bound a kerchief, studded



Young Hou-Ni Woman.

with little silver knobs, and adorned on either side with cowries and red worsted tassels, behind which fell two lappets, embroidered horizontally with green and red. The same colours and dress are to be found among the nomads of Thibet. The Poula lady had a bronzed oval face, and small features, except the lower lip

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and the chin. A more original head-dress was one which we saw among the Lintindjou women. On a little knot of hair was perched a plaited straw circlet, like those worn by the Annamite sharpshooters, from which hung a fringe with white tassels. The

costume was composed of a jacket, fastened with two silver clasps, black trousers, and linen bands tied round the ankles. These natives seemed very shy. One woman, of whom I took a snap-shot, had a vivacious little face, with strongly protruding forehead, and eyes that were scarcely at all oblique. She was clearly dis-



Lolo Woman at Mongtse.

tinguishable from both Chinese and Annamite. Some Hou-Ni women were also pointed out to us, clothed in tunics which descended to the knee, and wearing on their breasts a round silver plate, with designs of crabs and scorpions.

This first glimpse of the native population only increased our

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desire to see more of them, by taking a different route to Ssumao on the right bank of the Red River. To the questions we put at Manhao, the reply was that there was no road but that followed by the caravans through Mongtse and Yuen-chiang. The telegraph clerk, however, mentioned to me that he had heard of a path on the right bank, though a very bad one. Here, at any rate, was a clue. Roux and I discovered this path on foot, saw that it continued in the distance, and was fit for mules. While reconnoitring, we passed through the pretty little village of Lao-Manhao, opposite which was a wood of mimosa, tamarisk, and other trees, covering the base of the hill. I have rarely found a spot of equal fragrance, and interest for the ornithologist; small birds in great variety fluttered in it, and I secured some good specimens.

The mode of employing our time in Manhao was pleasant enough, but it was not getting on at all. So that it was with pleasure that we saw one part of our effects start under the care of M. Dupont's factor, who was to convoy them as far as Mongtse. We made a bargain for some mules, at the rate of nine "tens" apiece to Mongtse, which was one "ten" more than the ordinary tariff. They carried thirty-eight of our packages.

On the 14th (February) eighteen pack animals, sent to us from Mongtse, came in. We were now able to depart. At the last moment another delay arose in the disposal of the loads, which were too heavy. The Yünnan method of loading the animals was to place a pad upon a wooden saddle, with two side pieces fitting close to the shoulder. There was no girth; the saddle was simply kept in position by breast and crupper straps. Either flap had on the outer side a small wooden peg, sole support of a light and capacious frame, to which the baggage was secured

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by leather thongs. The advantage of the system is that the harness is independent of the pack, and one can off-saddle for the night without disturbing anything. The ease with which one can disencumber the mule facilitates his passage in dangerous spots. Indeed, being thus able to rid himself of his burden, he often availed himself of this avoidance of accident on his own account. When the weights are even, as may easily be managed with tea or cotton for cargo, the mule can carry much without suffering. But with mixed lots, such as ours, the system of loading caused sores. The treatment of the mules consequently called for great care. The average load was from 120 lbs. to 140 lbs., half on either side. Those that gave most trouble were the chests containing money. Each one in itself was 120 lbs. They had therefore to be distributed. We were carrying to Mongtse piastres to exchange there against Chinese ingots, and, as robbers were numerous, they required watching.

In the afternoon we were at last ready, and the real journey commenced. Being in high spirits at the prospect of active employment, everything seemed interesting and picturesque. Things struck us which soon we should not heed: the boys upon their ponies, odd-looking figures in their half-European half-Annamite get-up; the interpreter, perched high on a heap of rugs, with a dirty squash hat on his head, and his toes thrust into loops of straw for stirrups. Each of us was no doubt a caricature to his neighbour.

The first part of our route was a steady ascent, from 510 feet to 6,150 feet. The mules climbed sturdily in single file, urged by the shouts and imprecations of the drivers. You can't travel in Yünnan without constant "*malépious*." The leader bore our red flag, with my name on it in Chinese characters. It was the

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same which had already seen service with me from Koulja to Tonkin, five years before. Who knew what countries it was to behold this time!

It took us two days and a half to reach Mongtse, sleeping each night in the corners of the inn stables. On the way we passed a strange series of isolated hills, like detached sugar-loaves, and christened them the Cone Chain. At their base we came across many funnel-shaped depressions, which in semblance might have been the moulds in which the cones had been cast. The only vegetation was scanty grass but ill covering the grey stones. Although only at an altitude of 6,175 feet, we received the impression of high summits. A closer view revealed that these mountains could not be attributable to volcanic formation, as one had first been inclined to believe. They were of grey limestone, like those of the bay of Along. Traces of coal in the neighbourhood tended to confirm the idea that the same geological forces that in Tonkin appear as cliffs here showed themselves in cones.

After descending from the Cone Chain, a march of varied elevation brought us to a rocky gap surmounted by a little pagoda. Before us lay the great plain of Mongtse. For two hours we continued at a round pace through cultivated fields, and past the small town of Si-ngan-tso, until we checked our beasts beneath the walls of Mongtse, in front of a spacious white building used as the French Consulate, and were received by MM. Guérin and Mark.

This last-named gentleman bore on his hand the trace of a recent wound. Some time before, he had been attacked in his house by six men armed with spears. He defended the door of his room behind a barrier of chairs, but received a blow from a pike through

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the panel. On the alarm being given his assailants fled, and, it is needless to add, were still at large.

Having bestowed our belongings in the consulate, we prepared to remain there a few days. Mongtse was the last town of relative civilisation which we were likely to see for a long time, and we had to make final arrangements for both our own caravan and for the forwarding of our reserve. Here I met an old acquaintance, a missionary, known before in 1890 at Yünnan-Sen, and his experience and advice were of great value in our equipment. The Father at this period was at loggerheads with the Chinese Government. Having been charged by Monseigneur Fenouil to establish a mission station at Mongtse, he had bought a house and signed the agreement with the owner. This done, he sent the title-deeds to the Taotai for registration. But the latter, instead of returning them, passed them on to some notables, to whom the property was thus made over. Our consul vainly demanded restitution. As for the missionary, he adopted the only mode of retort to the knavery of the Government, by refusing to budge from the house when once in it, unless another, on which he had his eye, were offered in its place. These tricks of the Chinese in the case of the missionaries did not astonish me: I knew them of old. Our countrymen may deem themselves fortunate when the vexation is confined to petty annoyances. On the voyage from Aden to Indo-China we had on board a missionary of Yünnan, who was again bound thither after a visit to Paris to be healed. This Father Vial had received fourteen knife stabs, several of his ribs had been broken, and he showed me the scars of the wounds. I should have liked some sceptic Thomas to have had the same privilege. When attacked by the myrmidons of the mandarin, Father Vial owed his life to his single strength of will alone. He was returning bravely to his post, as if nothing had

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happened ; and certainly the satisfaction extracted from the Chinese Government by the representations of our consul had not been granted out of any goodwill to the Father. Most of the braves were banished to another province—a trivial punishment for men who had no ties. They did indeed select for condemnation one man—he was already dead from natural causes in prison. As for the instigator of the outrage, he was of course undisturbed. It was declared at Peking that the affair had been exaggerated, and that the reparation was ample. One cannot help thinking what idea of our power the Chinese are likely to derive from our acquiescence in such procedure. After this there is small room for surprise at their attitude towards our Frontier Delimitation Commission. Already it had been attacked in the basin of the Black River, and was reported to be followed by three hundred pirates ostensibly in “the service” of the mandarin of Yünnan. Whether or no, it is certain that the Imperial commissioner betook himself to Mongtse, under pretext of resting from his labours. For ourselves, as travellers, by making the best of things we might hope to pass through without active molestation.

First of all we had mules to buy. It was difficult to procure any at Mongtse, for the Pavie Mission had taken a good many, and the mandarin himself had just purchased twenty beauties for twelve taëls apiece—fixing his own price. M. Gérard, a Frenchman in the Customs, kindly offered to help us, and spent three days in the mountains among the dirty Miaotses, bringing back fifteen mules and a promise of seven more in a few days. We paid on an average thirty taëls for each animal. Then there were pack-saddles to get, straps, and blankets to cover the chattels from rain and the men at night. The beasts were next roughed, and branded on the shoulder with an O. Finally came the question of the hire of followers.

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We took seven to begin with. One of them, Li, small, youthful, and marked with smallpox, looked more of a hillman than Chinese, though he hailed from the Yangtse. To him was given the command of the others, with the title of *makotou*, or leader of the caravan.

His subordinates were simple muleteers, *mafous*, paid at the rate of seven taëls a month through him. He received more, would cater for the men, do the same work as they, and act as farrier and vet. to the expedition. In his latter capacity he did not omit to ask for an advance to purchase drugs.

Some of these

arrangements had afterwards to be modified, but for the present our *mafous* were all smiles and sweetness; the day after their engagement they brought us bouquets of jasmine. Loads were apportioned, saddles adjusted, supplies laid in, and all with the greatest cheerfulness. The *makotou* was quick, and did most of



Chinese working rude Crane.

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the duties. "If in three days my men don't learn how to work," said he, with a significant gesture, "I take a board and touch them up behind." The Chinese do not look far ahead; the present is enough for them as long as they are well off. An incident occurred here which was characteristic. Sao and a Cantonese lad, François' personal attendant, quarrelled, and the Annamite struck the Chinese with a hatchet. I do not know which was in fault; but the interpreter, naturally taking the part of his compatriot, without referring to us, straightway lodged a formal complaint. The matter might have become complicated; so we interposed, and, putting Sao under temporary arrest, deposited a sum of money with M. Guérin—one part for the care of the Chinese, and the other as an indemnity. I may add that the servant, a true Celestial, preferred the gain to the grievance.

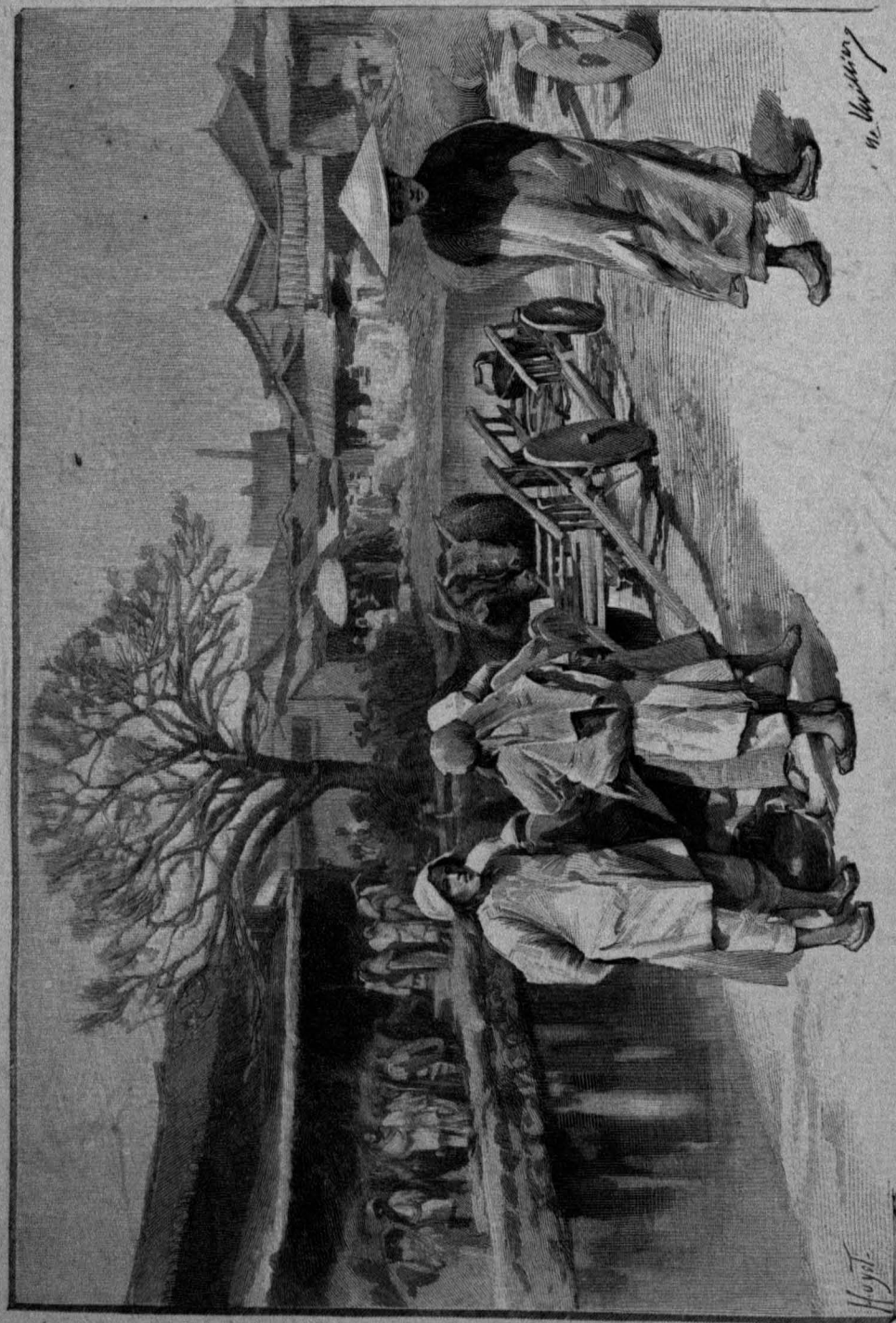
One of the chief difficulties of the traveller in China is that of money. The coin must be carried in bulk. We intrusted our stock of piastres to three jewellers, who melted them down at the rate of a thousand a day. A powder thrown into the fused mass caused the copper to separate, the silver was run into moulds, and we received it in dainty ingots, pitted with small holes like a sponge, and inscribed with Chinese characters. We sent a portion of our meltings on to the care of the missionary at Tali-Fou. There is a company formed for the transmission of money by post in the provinces, with insurance against loss by robbery; but unhappily this was not in operation between Mongtse and Tali. We were obliged to take a draft on Yünnan-Sen, whence the mission would forward to us. The first banker applied to refused the accommodation when he knew what was required. An order had been issued by the Taotai against any aid to Europeans. I recognised once more the habitual grace of the Chinese authorities. Luckily, another

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was found whose official fears were not proof against his money greed, and our remaining specie was transformed into two cheques of 4,000 and 2,000 taëls. We gained by the exchange, as our silver received a value of 20 per cent. over the capital.

It may be imagined that all these dispositions were not completed in a day. Before arriving at any result much time was consumed in arguing, bargaining, and making *chang-liang* in Chinese parlance. We turned the intervals to advantage by examining the town and its environs, and in conversation with the few European residents.

Mongtse contains about 11,000 inhabitants. The place offers but little of interest, and is quiet. The people, accustomed to the going and coming of whites, appeared indifferent to our proceedings, although the most extravagant reports had been spread about our arrival. It was said that a king's son (Chinese, "*tchingouan*," prince) was coming up to Mongtse with a thousand armed men. I was used to these legends. Every week on market day the streets presented an interesting spectacle. At the entrance, outside the rampart, long strings of carrier oxen stood waiting behind the straw-wrapped bales of yarn or sheets of tin for the custom-house examination. Crowds of country folk thronged the gate, the Poula element predominating. The women of this race, with round faces sheltered under linen bonnets somewhat resembling those of the Little Sisters of the Poor, crouched beside baskets of vegetables. The men wore small open vests and a blue turban, round which they twisted their pigtails. Here an old beggar woman chanted her nasal plaint to the accompaniment of oblong castanets. She was not bewitching,—we were far from an Esmeralda,—but we threw her a few sapecks. There went by the tinker, with his professional cry of "Pouko! Pouko!" At a



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little distance squatted some men round a mat, silent for the most part, but each attentive to what was going on round him, as shown by the small and glittering eye. Some rustics who had



Poula Women, Mongtse.

made good bargains stopped to gamble away most of their gains to the Chinese. An umbrella with pink silk fringe came in view, and at sight of us was hastily and jealously lowered by the modest charmer. Mongtse and Lingau-Fou are said to be the

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only two Chinese towns where ladies of rank come out on foot in this guise. I paused at the stall of a silversmith, and watched him at work as among the Laos States, his silver plate resting upon a wax mould fixed to a block, while with mallet and chisel he shaped his trinkets. A murmur behind us apprised us of the approach of some notable, and we drew ourselves up to let the procession pass. First advanced matchlock men, fairly well set up, with flags and a gong beater at their head. In rear of them were borne wooden placards, banners representing the Imperial dragon, and a huge screen in shape like a leaf. Then followed six boys in long red and green skirts, with caps of the same colours, and a big gold sword at the shoulder. Next came men armed with tridents, and two others blowing trumpets—the long copper trumpet well known amongst the pirates of Tonkin for its rallying note. More long-robed children, extinguished, under pointed astrologers' hats, and shouting for all they were worth. Then civil dignitaries; men of letters with crystal buttons; mounted mandarins in silk robes brocaded with gold, and horse-tails waving from their hats. And last of all, the main figure, lolling in his heavy green litter, was borne the *tchentai*, or military chief.

This General Ma was a good friend to us. In appearance he was big and corpulent, with an aquiline nose. In faith a Mussulman, and well disposed to the French; in all difficulties between the missionaries and the authorities he tried to make things smooth. Following a visit which we paid him, came an invitation to a great feast which lasted fully two hours and a half. The Mussulman cuisine was excellent, and consisted of plates of rice, potatoes, mutton killed according to the rites and prepared strictly without pig's fat. For drink we had champagne alternating with



Group of Inhabitants, Mongise.

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"tchaotiou" (Chinese o.d.v.). We were offered a vintage dating from 1870, and brought from the capital. The general insisted on drinking healths with each of us in turn, without heel-taps. His children—a large-eyed little girl of an Indian type of face, and a boy with a fine fur-embroidered cap—came in to see us, and made the round of the table, bowing before each guest. Our host appeared very fond of them, which is common enough in China; but he had an exceptionally frank manner towards foreigners—a disposition I have remarked among Chinese Mussulmans very different from that of their Buddhist fellow-countrymen. The missionaries rarely have to complain of persecution at the hands of the Houi-houi or the Houé-dzeu, as the disciples of Mahomet are called in China. So far from attacking the Christians, they sometimes even support them; but they never become converts. "You have a God," they say to our priests; "so have we: we both have a book; let us be friends."

The general did not speak to us on religion. He came to see us at the consulate on foot with a small retinue, which for a mandarin showed a very unusual freedom from formality. He was interested in our firearms, and inquired their cost; and hearing us express some wish, sent us milk and native cigars as a present. I think if I had never had to do with any Chinese but Ma I should have formed a different opinion of his compatriots.

Besides the consular and missionary staff, we found very agreeable society at the custom-house. The superintendent was an American, Mr. Carl, a connection of Sir Robert Hart, and well qualified to give me interesting commercial statistics. The greater part of the merchandise is of English origin, and comes from Canton by Pésé. The trade returns give a total

FROM TONKIN TO INDIA

of 2,185,200 taëls, in which Tonkin unfortunately is only represented by 313,983 taëls. The slowness in the development of our commerce with China is to be attributed to three chief causes:—

(1) Our houses do not study the taste or pocket of the natives.

(2) Freight on the Red River is too high. For instance, wicker chairs at fifty piastres have to pay thirty piastres from Hong-Kong to Manhao.

(3) Salt, which formerly served as a medium of exchange between Tonkin and Yünnan, can no longer, thanks to a clause in the Treaty of 1885, be introduced into that province.

We know our errors; it is for us to remedy them, if we would profit by the privileged commercial position which Tonkin gives us on the flank of China. I cannot too strongly insist on the danger there is of our playing the rôle of the hare to the English tortoise. Whilst writing these lines I have before me the last Report of the Royal Geographical Society, in which is marked by a dotted line the railway *in course of construction* from Mandalay to the frontier of China. The English have 275 miles in a straight line to traverse. We, who from Hanoi to Laokay have only 135 miles, or half as far,—what are we doing?

The reader will pardon this digression, and impute it solely to my desire to attract attention, whenever I have the occasion, to questions often neglected, and moreover of exceptional gravity for the future expansion of our trade.

The grounds of the custom-house adjoined those of the consulate. A house is valued here at from 2,000 to 3,000 taëls, the expense being largely enhanced from the distance which wood for building has to be brought. Although verandahs are

HANOÏ TO MONGTSE

common, one need scarcely seek shelter from the sun ; the climate of Mongtse is splendid ; except in the two rainy months (June-July, or July-August), it is almost always fine. The plain is healthy for Europeans. The natives have to fear the plague,



A Street in Mongtse.

which is endemic, and seems to haunt certain localities of Yünnan without any cause. The sickness generally comes in the summer, and sometimes claims four thousand or five thousand victims. First to be attacked are the rats, which may then be seen

FROM TONKIN TO INDIA

scampering in the streets, jumping and writhing as if mad. Then comes the turn of the cats. It is as if the poison rose from the ground, and, mounting, infected in succession all it met. In the case of human beings the malady shows itself by a swelling of the glands. The missionaries have successfully employed as a remedy a strong emetic. Europeans are seldom included in its ravages.

The food resources are plentiful; mutton and beef one owes to the Mussulmans; and fruit and vegetables, European as well as native, abound; strawberries, peaches, apricots, and nuts being good. There are many pretty walks in the neighbourhood; in the mountains you may find silver pheasants and hares, while the rice-fields of the plain teem with water-fowl and white herons. The Chinese protect the latter birds; they say they carry the souls of the dead to heaven; and upon their tombs in their religious designs they give a symbolical significance to the heron analogous to that which we give to the dove. There is something similar among the ancient Egyptians.

Europeans receive two posts a week—one through the custom-house, the other through the consulate; they come in five days overland from Laokay *viâ* Sinchaï.

CHAPTER II

FROM MONGTSE TO SSUMAO

Departure from Mongtse—Descent to Manhao—Cross the Red River—Mafou Fears—Exploration—On the Right Bank; Ascent—Difficulties with our Men—The Hou-Nis—At Fong-chen-lin—Hospitality of a Chinese Mandarin—Hydraulic Pestles—The Liutindjous—Hou-Nis again—By the River Side—District of the Païs—First Appearance of Lolos—New Natives of the Miaotse Tribe—A Few Words on the Natives of Yünnan—Pretty Country by the River—Isa; Particulars of—Hou-Ni Adventure—Souto; Discovery of Lolo MSS.—Fresh Facts about the Hou-Nis and the Païs—At Lou-tchou; Lodge with a Lolo Chief; Information concerning the Lolos—Our Followers—François—The Urchin—Victims of a Theft—Our Prisoners—Death of my Horse—Difficult Passage of the La-niou-ho—Renewed Trouble with the Mafous—More Natives, the Hatous—Passage of the Black River—Fire!—Muong-le—Halt at Muong-le; Tidings of M. Pavie—The Market; Trade Statistics—Scene among the Mafous—On the Road again; a Hailstorm, and its Effects—Worship of the Wood Deity—In the Basin of the Mekong—Forest Bivouac—500th Kilomètre—Chantzeu and his Steed—Pretty Scenery—Arrival at Ssumao.

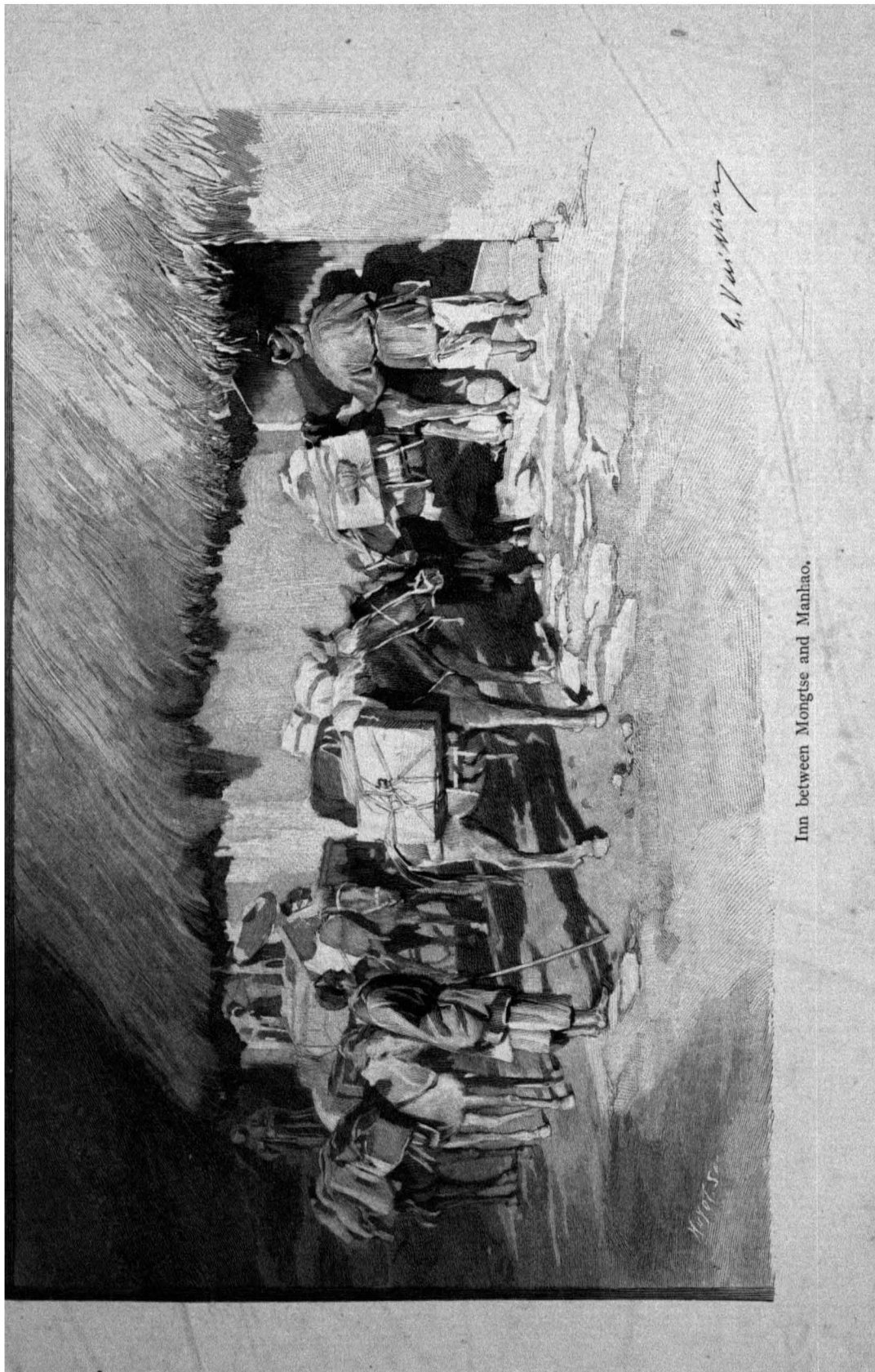
WE quitted Mongtse finally on the 27th February. What we did not take with us we left in the care of the consul, to be despatched by caravan to Yünnan-Sen and Tali. By the same route we were to receive a chest of a thousand rupees and some photograph plates which had not yet reached Mongtse.

Our start was the signal for the letting off of crackers and muskets. All this uproar, which is a conventional attention in China on the arrival or departure of travellers, was not at all to the taste of our horses, and caused them to be restive. In a couple of months you might have fired a field-piece without making the same worn-out beasts twitch an ear.

FROM TONKIN TO INDIA

The usual road to Ssumao and the West was by way of Yuenkiang and Ta-lan; so, when we turned our faces again towards Manhao, François officiously was for setting us right. But we purposely adopted this slightly longer route, which, though known, is not marked on the maps. As we retraversed the plain, strewn with iron-ore, we saw flocks of grey cranes with black heads, looking in the distance like peasants at work. With the approach to the mountains the flora changed; I found gnaphalium, asters, pretty pink primroses, and by the side of these plants of high altitudes some small crimson azaleas such as are met with on the banks of the Black River. The weather, which had promised well, suddenly changed, and we were caught in a storm of hail. At once the songs ceased; silently we plodded in Indian file, the horses slipping and falling continually. It was the beginning of our troubles. I dropped behind, and lost the way. Roux came back and sought me in the dark; we could not see where to place our feet, and it was with difficulty and many tumbles that we at length gained our camp. Rarely had a cup of tea seemed so refreshing.

The next day we were back again among the quaint Cone Hills. Not far from here I noticed in a field a bier covered with hay and surrounded with thorn branches; the dead body awaited transport over the mountain for burial in consecrated ground. We shared our sleeping quarters that night with a caravan of tin. At all the inns they feed the animals on chopped straw, so that the sound of the cutter was going pretty nearly all night. As the stage had been a short one, we had tasted the charm of arriving early, and it was pleasant at sundown to get into the open country far from the din of the caravan and the chatter of the Chinese. I seated myself on a mound above the path, and



Inn between Mongtse and Manhao.

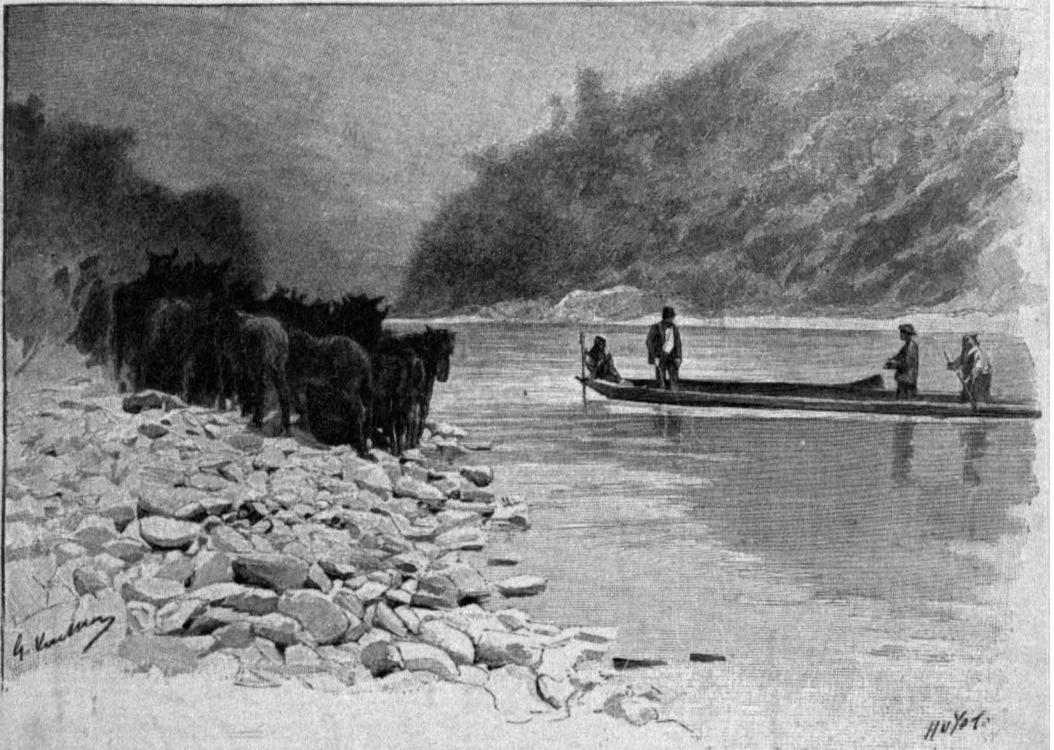
H. Van der Meer

Mongtse

FROM MONGTSE TO SSUMAO

watched a group of Poula women laden with wood, the weight of which was sustained by a linen band across the forehead. On catching sight of me they hesitated whether to advance, but at last plucked up heart to pass in a body.

On the 1st March, in the morning, we re-entered Manhao, after a few ordinary experiences by the way. We met two men carrying



On the Red River.

a corpse by head and heels, slung to a bough, on which a sacrificial cock was fastened. The cortége, preceded by a man gently tapping a small gong, disappeared up a narrow defile, and we heard the receding sob of the gong long after it was lost to view. Unbelievers these Chinese may be, but they will traverse mountains for the sake of burying their dead in hallowed ground. At another place we encountered a minor chief with the usual accompaniment

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of red flags, scarlet robes, blue trousers, and yellow straw hats, contributing with the bright sunshine in an arid country to a dazzling and picturesque effect. At Manhao we only stopped for breakfast, deeming it more prudent not to halt our followers long in a town, as we were about to attempt the route on the right bank of the Song-Coï, of which Roux and I had found the beginning. To cross the river we had to put the saddles and loads on small rafts, and then tried to pass the animals over by swimming. These, however, did not see it in the same light, despite shouts, and blows, and volleys of stones from the urchins in the crowd which had come out to see us. After prolonged struggles and breaks away, swearing man triumphed over stubborn brute, and by dint of lifting the intractable ones a hoof at a time on to the raft we all got over. The makotou proved himself resourceful; but as for François, he contented himself with playing the part of the fly on the coach-wheel, and stood by the brink dangling his day's food—three fishes on a string—and offering useless advice. Our mafous expressed great surprise when we announced that we should camp farther on. They did not know the way,—there were no inns. "What were the tents for, if not to sleep in the open?" said we. "How were the beasts to be fed?"—"Carry grain for them, and three days' supplies for yourselves." François then struck in: There were pirates on the right bank, and they had long guns.—"So much the better; we shall be able to photograph them."

It was clear that our people had not reckoned on this style of travel, and counted on following main roads and always sleeping within four walls; the Annamites, on the other hand, followed us in silence. The delay at the ferry made it impossible to go far that night, so we camped on a sandbank by the river, and experienced the real joy of being independent in the middle of our own troop.

FROM MONGTSE TO SSUMAO

From here the true work of exploration might be said to begin. Before us lay the unknown. Perhaps illusion sometimes colours our impressions. Well, illusion let it be! I believe in dreams, and pity those whose sterile minds no impulse ever stirs.

Amongst the latter might be classed our mafous; they were no dreamers. Yet, was it imagination that led them to take two shining sparks in the thicket behind us for living panther's eyes? We had to fire our guns to reassure them. These fellows began to see that our journey meant business. On arrival at the camping-ground one of the mules was missing, having been allowed to straggle by the way. What was worse, it was one that carried specie. After two hours' search it was led in; but these early troubles disheartened the makotou, who sat himself down and wept, declaring that he could not do everything by himself. We soothed him with commendation, and he presently forgot his woes in the consolation of his opium pipe.

He would not perhaps have slept so soundly had he known what awaited us on the next day—one of the hardest for man and beast in the whole of this part of the undertaking. A week later we could not have performed this stage, at least in one piece. It was uphill all the way and fairly good going, but followed the crests without deviation. I pitied our animals: the horses struggled gamely, scrambling up the steepest bits, and every now and then stopping abruptly to regain their wind. The march seemed unending; no sooner had we topped one summit than another rose before us. Once the track led us through a wood, where we saw some natives hunting a stag with boar-spears, a dog, and a horn like a sea-conch. I marvelled at the agility with which they sprang over the boulders. In the afternoon we passed from the valley of the Red River into that of one of its tributaries. The hillsides here

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were covered for two-thirds of their height with rice-fields, rising in regular terraces, over which water trickled in a series of cascades that glittered like glass in the sun. The stream was conducted in canals, whose horizontal lines could be discerned for many miles following the contour of the hills. This method of irrigation was quite a work of art, all the embankments being thrown up by hand and stamped hard by foot. In Madagascar the rice-fields occupy only the hollows; here they scaled even the flanks of the hills, and I could not but reflect on the capabilities which these peasants might develop in the vast tracts of fertile land unused in our colonies. Here and there were sparse patches of trees or scrub, with groups of enormous bamboos and a profusion of varied ferns. In this damp climate it was not uncommon to start in the morning in thick mist, which rendered the path so slippery that the horses could not keep their footing on the shining rock and sodden grass; and falls were frequent. The *mafous*, who shiver at 50° Fahr., grumbled and invented fresh pretexts every day for shortening the stage. It was now the 3rd of March, and already they talked of leaving us. The interpreter, of whose sullen disposition we had also had evidence, joined them and announced that he would go no farther with us. His conceit was unendurable, and often made him ridiculous. One day, upon Roux making some remark on the route, François told him there were Chinese maps.

"Yes; but they are no good," replied my companion.

"You French say that, because we have three thousand words, and you can't understand them," was the rejoinder.

We were placed in a somewhat awkward predicament; for we were dependent on our muleteers, and could neither here nor at Manhao find others to replace them. We adopted conciliatory measures, and, by lightening the undoubtedly severe labour of the

FROM MONGTSE TO SSUMAO

mafous and slightly increasing François' pay, tided over the difficulty. The treaty of peace was cemented by the slaughter of a fat pig, and we were "Tajen ho!" ("the great and good") once more.

The villages where we usually passed the nights in more or less discomfort were collections of thatched huts from twenty to sixty in number, in the best of which we spread our rugs on wooden bedsteads, and, to my surprise, were not devoured by fleas. Beyond a few Chinese traders and innkeepers, the population was for the most part Poula or Hou-Ni. The approach to a Hou-Ni village was generally marked by posts to which small bamboo pegs were suspended,—in one case a quartered cock transfixed by an arrow, in another a bow; all of which were supposed to avert evil spirits. The Hou-Nis of this district seemed of pure breed and pronounced type; the men muscular and dark, with straight noses, small chins, and an expression of much energy. They wore a loose dark blue jacket with silver buttons, and nearly all had on the left arm a copper bracelet of Chinese make. Their hair was plaited in a tail, and often covered by a horsehair cap. We had heard good reports of them as hardy but independent mountaineers, not very amenable to Chinese supremacy. The costume of the women was a black turban with folds falling behind or gathered in front into two horns, with a band across the forehead adorned with silver studs, sometimes with a cross in the centre, while others bore a disc of the same metal on the breast. A few had an over-garment with two lappets à la Robespierre. I had seen Yao women above Laichau similarly dressed. We constantly met them on the road, with their baskets on their shoulders fastened to a sort of yoke on the neck to avoid chafing, and a forehead strap

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to take the weight. Whenever they saw us they turned their backs and plunged into the thicket.

At a distance these natives in their monochrome of blue-black presented a sombre appearance. We photographed a few Hou-Nis in one of their villages at Ba-kopo. They call themselves "Hou-Nia," but scarcely sound the "a." Their women are valued

at from sixteen to thirty-six taëls, and the rich have two wives. They inter their dead, and mark their mourning by a strip of white linen on the head. Their religion is the worship of ancestors. They rent the ground for tillage from the district of



Chinese Girl before her House.

Kai-hoa, but they have no other impost than this land tax. The Government gives them a Chinese chief, who resides at Koate; and they have also a headman of their own of less importance, to whom they give the title "tien-ni." Interrogated as to manuscripts, they replied that they had none of their own and knew no characters but Chinese. They had a musical instrument, a three-stringed guitar, from which they get a very soft tone.