

THE FRENCH
IN INDO-CHINA.

WITH A NARRATIVE OF GARNIER'S
EXPLORATIONS IN COCHIN-CHINA, ANNAM,
AND TONQUIN.

WITH THIRTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS.

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CHAPTER V

M. MOUHOT IN CAMBODIA.



MUCH of the interesting and valuable information we have acquired of late years in reference to Siam, Cambodia, and Laos, we owe to the indefatigable labours of Henri Mouhot, the eminent French naturalist, who penetrated into regions previously unknown to Europeans in the years 1858, 1859, and 1860, and devoted himself to the service of Science with equal ability and zeal. He finally fell a victim to his heroic ardour—being seized with fever while on his way from Na-Lé to Luang Prabang, in Laos, on the 19th of October 1861, and dying, almost alone, with the exception of two faithful native servants, on the 10th of November.

He spent nearly four years in exploring the interior of Siam. As his biographer tells us, he first travelled through that country, then entered Cambodia, and afterwards made his way up the

ruary 1861 he arrived at Chaiapune. It was not until he had encountered and conquered obstacles that would have broken the heart of any man less enthusiastic or less courageous that he succeeded in making his way to Korat. As he describes it as "a nest of robbers and assassins, the resort of all the scum of the Laotian and Siamese races," the rendezvous of "bandits and vagrants escaped from slavery or from prison," he would hardly have found it a pleasant resting-place; and as soon as he could obtain a supply of elephants for himself and his followers, he resumed his journey, striking across the country to Poukieau.

Here he ascended gradually a range of mountains abounding in resinous trees and frequented by deer, tigers, elephants, and rhinoceros. This chain extends directly north, continually increasing in height and breadth, and throwing off numerous spurs towards the east, where the deep shadowy valleys collect their waters, and pour them into the Mekong.

Throughout this mountainous region elephants are the only means of transport. Every village, consequently, possesses one of these valuable animals; some no fewer than fifty or a hundred.

notorious haunts of pirates, who capture coasting-junks, plunder the villages, and kidnap women and children to supply the Chinese slave-markets. Add to this the unconscionable extortions of the mandarins, and the frequent visits of pestilence, famine, and floods, and it will be acknowledged that the lot of the peasant of Tonquin is not wholly one of ease and pleasure.

Farther south, within the confines of Annam proper, the mountains draw nearer to the sea, and some of their spurs come down to its margin, lending to the coast-line a broken and indented outline. The rivers have short courses, and the cultivable land of this narrow maritime strip is much smaller than that of Tonquin. Annam, however, boasts of cinnamon groves that rank next to those of Ceylon in importance. Many other varieties of spices, dye-woods, drugs, and gums are found in its forests, which are the haunt also of the wild elephant, the rhinoceros, the tiger, and the formidable water-buffalo.

The Annamese are not a well-favoured people. The descriptions of Dr. Morice and other French explorers prepare us for as much as this; and Miss Bird declares that they are the ugliest of all the

We read that, in the beginning of the seventh century, Cambodia was one of the kingdoms dependent on the Chinese province of Tonquin, and regularly sent ambassadors with tribute to the Son of Heaven. About A.D. 625 it shook off the yoke, and even seized upon Tsiampa and Tonquin itself, and laid Siam under tribute. It was then that the Chinese gave the country the name of Kam-phou-che, which the Portuguese modified to Cambodia, though the Cambodians themselves speak of it as Sroc-Khmer—the country of the Khmer. Then, also, began the era when it waxed rich and famous, and when Ongcor and other magnificent cities rose on or near the Mekong.

In the days of Kublai Khan, Tonquin and Tsiampa were again subjected to China. Marco Polo tells how in 1278 the Great Khan sent "a baron of his called Sagatu," who reduced the king of "the great country of Chamba" (Tsiampa) to submission, and exacted from him a yearly tribute of twenty of his greatest and finest elephants. As a curious relic of ancient usage, it may be noted here that, in addition to receiving his investiture from Peking, the King of Annam to this day acknowledges the suzerainty of China, by the despatch every four

years, by the traditional land route, of an embassy to the emperor, bearing, as the chief emblems of vassalage, two elephants' tusks; besides which the tribute includes "two rhinoceros' horns, forty-five catties of betelnut, forty-five catties of grains of paradise, six hundred ounces of sandalwood, three hundred ounces of garronwood, one hundred pieces of native silk, one hundred pieces of white silk, one hundred pieces of unbleached silk, and one hundred pieces of native cloth."

With this recognition of supremacy, China has continued to be content, and has been calmly regardless of all the internal turmoil of rebellion, usurpation, and revolution, that for centuries has filled the record of its subject kingdoms. Once only, from 1418 to 1428, it interfered on behalf of a "rightful prince" against a "usurper," and took the administration of Tonquin directly into its own hands. But the experiment was not successful: the cost of maintaining a large standing army in Tonquin was greater than the province was worth, and so matters were allowed to revert to their old position. There have been constant wars and court intrigues and massacres; sometimes one, and more often several, native kingdoms have

"gold rods and loaves of salt," had remained hidden from the eyes of Western mankind since the days when Marco Polo described them.

The same year the doings of another traveller, whose name is destined to take a leading place in the history of French enterprise in Tonquin, came prominently before his countrymen. This was M. J. Dupuis, a French trader at Hong-kong, who, seized with the desire to open up a trade route to South-Western China, penetrated by the Yang-tze to Eastern Yunnan, and won from the Chinese authorities a grudging permission to make his way by the Red River to the Gulf of Tonquin. At the time, the Imperialists were engaged in the work of ruthlessly stamping out the Mohammedan rebellion; but M. Dupuis managed cleverly to avoid the theatre of war and the pestilence that followed closely at its back. He passed over high mountain ranges and plateaus, through towns that carried on a busy transit trade in tea and cotton, and in the tin and other minerals of this rich metalliferous region; and descended on the main stream of the Song-ka river at Mang-hao, about twenty miles within the Chinese frontier.

Between Mang-hao and Lao-kai, where Tonquin

territory may be regarded as beginning, is a wild and broken country, occupied by independent tribes; steep cliffs hem in the river, and for a long distance below Lao-kai its navigation is still difficult, owing to the boulders, ledges of rock, and sand-banks that impede its course. The region, however, was reported by the traveller to be extremely rich in timber and minerals. Herds of elephants frequented the southern banks of the stream. The tiger, buffalo, wild ox, rhinoceros, panther, and bear roamed in the forests; and the wild boar, wild sheep, chamois, and peacock were among the four-footed and feathered game. The Le-ho, or "Black River," flowing through an unexplored part of Yunnan and Laos, enters the Song-ka from the right. At one time it was hoped that its waters might offer a channel for trade to Western China; but it has been found to be utterly impracticable from rapids and cataracts. On the left or northern bank, the Song-ka receives its other chief affluent, the Tien-ho, or "Clear River." This draws its waters from the western frontiers of Yunnan and the adjoining province of Kuang-si. At one point they plunge through a subterranean channel below a great mass of mountains. Throughout, the char-