



SURVEYING AND EXPLORING
IN SIAM.

BY

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LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET

1900

CHAPTER XIV.

LUANG PRABANG CITY.

To our great horror, the camp had been pitched in as bad a place as possible, and its arrangement was precisely the opposite of that which we had directed. The rains, however, had set in, and such heavy requisitions had been made on the inhabitants in the building of the dreadful huts, that we felt it would be impracticable to begin all over again.

It was reported that the Haw were at Muang Yiw; so we could not return to Bangkok, as a move in that direction would have made them imagine we were afraid, and would certainly have invited attack on Luang Prabang. We had to do the best we could, and as nothing could save the men from fever, we had a site at once selected for a hospital, and the building begun.

Pia Sokotai was to have protected Muang Yiw, and he had built stockades for that purpose; but before the Haw made their appearance he was attacked by fever, and came down to Luang Prabang, whereupon the Haw burnt his stockades.

Some members of the *Senabodi*, or council, put in an appearance and asked that a day might be fixed for my visit to the chief.

The official letter, or *supa aksaen*, was laid on a silver plate and carried under a white umbrella, preceded by fifes and drums, to the chief's house, the road to which was narrow, and at that season smelt very strongly. We passed through the principal market-place, which had small sheds on each side for the display of goods. It being noon, the market was deserted, and we picked our way as best we could through the slush.

When we arrived the principal Lao officials were assembled in uniform, and in a little while the chief himself came. He was a fine old man, seventy-seven years of age, of a very gentle disposition, and much beloved by the people. I had read that Luang Prabang was

once tributary to Anam, and on my asking the old chief if such was the case, his answer was short and decisive—"Never." He said that Anam belonged to China, and that Luang Prabang had formerly paid tribute to China every ten years, the tribute having been taken from Muang Sai to Muang La of the Sib Sawng Pana to the Governor of Yunnan, whom they called Chao Fa Weng. The tribute had consisted of 4 elephants, 41 mules, 533 lbs. of nok (metal composed of



MARKET-PLACE, LUANG PRABANG, 1885.

gold and copper), 25 lbs. of rhinoceros' horns, 1000 lbs. of ivory, 250 pieces of home-spun cloth, 1 horn, 150 bundles of areca-palm mats, 150 coconuts, and 33 bags of the rice of the fish *pa buk*.

While we were enjoying a pleasant conversation with the old chief, a concert of bull-frogs was kept up under the house.

The market-place of Luang Prabang was rather crowded in the mornings, and it was interesting to stroll through the strange medley of men and women bartering and chaffering in their different jargons.

Rupees were not exclusively used as money, but were melted

Chan, we found that many of the pine trees had been girdled. These would afterwards be hewn down, cut into lengths of about a yard, and floated down the river to provide firewood. Rounding a spur, we had a view of the whole valley of Muang Ngan. The lower slopes of the hills, bare of trees, were bright with various shades of green, and the contour lines, at intervals of about 2 feet, were traced with great regularity. My companion was a man over sixty years of age, and on my asking him how the lines had been formed, he replied: "They are paths made by buffaloes and bullocks when grazing." I remarked that it was a beautiful country, and the old man warmed to the subject: "Yes," he said; "I was born here; my father, grandfather, and all before me, as far as I know, were born here. Those old fortifications that are seen all round belong to a time beyond the memory of man, for my grandfather knew nothing about them; but those lines that you can make out along the side of the hill were once cart-roads for bringing fuel to Ngan. Those traces of terraces on the hill-slopes show the fields which were once planted with 'garden' rice. There we made reservoirs by bunding the streams, and channels led the water to the fields. Once the country was crowded with a happy and prosperous population, but they are all gone, and the glory of the land is departed."

On March 18 we said "Good-bye" to beautiful Ngan. Passing over Pu Mieng, which had once been covered with gardens of Mieng or tea, and crossing the main watershed we descended into a rough, jungly country, and entered the valley of the Nam Mo. An elephant driver met with a bad accident; he was carrying rice to Muang Mo, and the elephant fell on the steep path which, with the recent rains, had become very slippery. I met the Governor of Muang Mo, who was on his way to drink the water of allegiance at Chieng Kwang, and urged him to return as soon as possible, as his absence would be awkward. We encamped at Ban Mung, where there was some excitement about a man-eating tiger, which, about ten days before, had carried off his fourth victim. The night being very dark and rainy, we kept no watch for the animal; but the men were placed in security in a house in the village, and we barricaded our tents.

The valley of the Nam Mo is rough and very jungly, and on the right bank of the river are precipitous limestone cliffs. Muang Ngat is in an excellent position, which recalls Puan; but it has been completely deserted since the murder of the governor and his sons.