

# FROM TONKIN TO INDIA

BY THE SOURCES OF THE IRAWADI

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BY

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## FROM TONKIN TO INDIA .

palm grove. Down on the level the sun struck bright on the streams that watered the rice-fields and bananas, and the butterflies and birds of gaudy hues reminded us that we were not in northern latitudes. Muong-le proved to be a small town of less importance than Isa, wholly Chinese, and built on a slight hill in the centre of a plain, with the usual characteristics of wood or plastered houses. We found good quarters in a sufficiently clean granary belonging to an inn. The inhabitants lost no time in telling us that two Frenchmen had been here only a few months before, coming from Lai-chau. It was not difficult from their description to identify one of these as Pavie, even had they not held his name in remembrance; the other was mentioned as wearing epaulettes, and was known to the Chinese as Ma. Here, as everywhere in my travels where I crossed his track, I was struck by the admirable impression Pavie had left on the people with whom he came in contact. The French cause in Indo-China has reason to be grateful to this pioneer for the esteem in which the name of France is held. It was always a matter of regret to me that I did not meet his expedition, to shake hands with fellow-workers in our common aim. We congratulated ourselves on the intersection of our respective routes, however, so that each in his research would fill in many blanks on the map of the region extending from the Chinese Song-Coï to the Mekong.

During our thirty-six hours' stay at Muong-le our relations with the inhabitants and the mandarin were excellent. We exchanged visits of courtesy and presents with the military commandant, "litajen." Nor did the crowd incommode us as at Isa. As the 29th was market-day we were able to gain much insight into the trade of the district. Skins of panthers, at one taël apiece, were common, also of the wild cat and ant-eater. I

## FROM MONGTSE TO SSUMAO

noticed at a druggist's the head of a two-horned rhinoceros, which had been killed four miles from here. The chief native industry is a black cotton stuff, of which quantities hung before the houses to dry. Other cotton is brought from Xieng-houng, and retailed at thirteen taëls the pecul; salt from Makai; sugar in round sticks from the neighbourhood, where the cane is cultivated, and sold at twenty-four sapecks the Chinese kilo.

The European articles of import are English needles, coloured silks from Yünnan-Sen, and French metal buttons from Canton. The natives also sell minute cherries, a species of freshwater shell-fish, tea of the district in small cylinders, rice, joss-sticks, tobacco from the adjacent country in twist and in leaf, the tender sprouts of the bamboo maize and ginger as delicacies, and vegetables. I also saw chintz from Chu-ping, wooden combs, pipe-stems, and flints. Little opium is to be seen in the outskirts of the place; it is introduced in large quantities from Xieng-houng or Mien-ling. It is not easy to gauge the caravan traffic, but from what I heard I should estimate it to average about five hundred mules a month, except in the three rainy ones.

We were off again on the morning of the 30th (March). The rest was useful and necessary, but emphasised the undesirability of staying in towns by an episode among our mafous that might have turned to drama, and clearly instanced the Chinese character. The evening before we started the makotou discovered the loss of a packet of money from the chest in which he had placed it. Suspicion fell on a mafou called Manhao, who had hitherto given no cause for dissatisfaction. Forthwith the makotou, without reference to us, warning, or proof, mustered the other mafous, and with their help bound the suspect tightly to a post. In this position they left the poor devil for the night.

## KHAMTI TO INDIA

tigers: if so, they were utterly inadequate for the purpose, and we inclined to the belief that they were connected with some religious superstition. When we bivouacked for the night, we should have felt more satisfied with the day's work if fever had not got a firm hold on four of our men. Loureti, the youngest of the troop, was the worst case, and kept up with difficulty, although the unselfish Anio took his pack as well as his own. Their condition distressed us, as we could do little to alleviate it beyond giving them flannel shirts and quinine. It is perhaps needless to say that this and the days that followed proved the utter fallaciousness of the information supplied us at Khamti. "Pessimus" had assured us we should have no more torrent scrambles; we had little else. As for Hoé Daung, the minister, he had told us that we could have no difficulty in finding the way, as there was no choice; he might have added that, for the most part, there was no route to lose. Without the guide it must have been impossible for us to guess it.

We ascended the valley of the Nam-Tsai, finding plentiful signs of forest rangers in the spoor of antelope, tigers, and rhinoceros. We had to thank the latter for many an enlarged path and flattened bank. Poulanghing, the guide, explained that these are two-horned rhinos, and that their flesh is good. Their prints were not so large as those which I had seen in Sundarbunds. In this forest march we came to a clearing where was a muddy spring, a likely lair for wild pig. In a large tree was built a machán or small bamboo platform, whence a hunter could command the descent of tiger or rhinoceros to drink.

Near our midday halt we had a stroke of luck in the discovery of two loads of rice placed under cover, no doubt by some folk against their return from Assam. It was a godsend and a