

The Anamese Pilgrimage at Van Cat.

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One afternoon the colporteur and the writer boarded a Chinese steamboat for Nam-Dinh. This trip was looked forward to with much joy and expectancy. Needless to say, there was no disappointment for God had more than met my expectation.

Upon our arrival we hired a native wheelbarrow for the three cases of books and baggage. Beginning at this city the pilgrims could be seen coming and going. Whole villages turned out in procession form. They were all clad in gay colors and bore upon their shoulders such furniture as was used on stated occasions. An attractive sight indeed! My heart often asked, "To what profit is all this?" As I looked into their faces,—for many had traveled miles and spent sleepless nights in their march and worship at the temples,—I tried to distinguish in which state, before or after, they were the happier. Truthfully, I could see no difference. If at all, it must have been in the first stage, for then they were in the height of expectancy and anticipation. But alas!

they turned away empty. They had spent their strength, their time and their money. They brought their gifts of food and fruit. They gave alms to the beggars by the wayside. All for what? To gain merit. But did they gain it? Nay. The Scripture says, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The Buddhist priests were kept busy from early morn till late at night. Shrines were visited along the way. They stopped long enough to bow and worship, drop a cash or two, and pass on. Were they profited by it? No. Poor blinded souls, they went away without the least benefit derived therefrom. One day ten thousand people passed through these temples, seeking something their souls were crying out after, but substituting a heathen worship for the soul's cry for God.

We always ask permission from both French and Anamese officials. This was granted without any hesitancy. The French Resident wrote, "Give the missionary liberty." Having arrived late in the afternoon, the sales were not so fast; but the next day we could have sold all we had. Hearing that the morrow was to be a big day, we saved some for that occasion. By experience of the day before, it was seen that the Anamese bought a dozen books as readily as one.

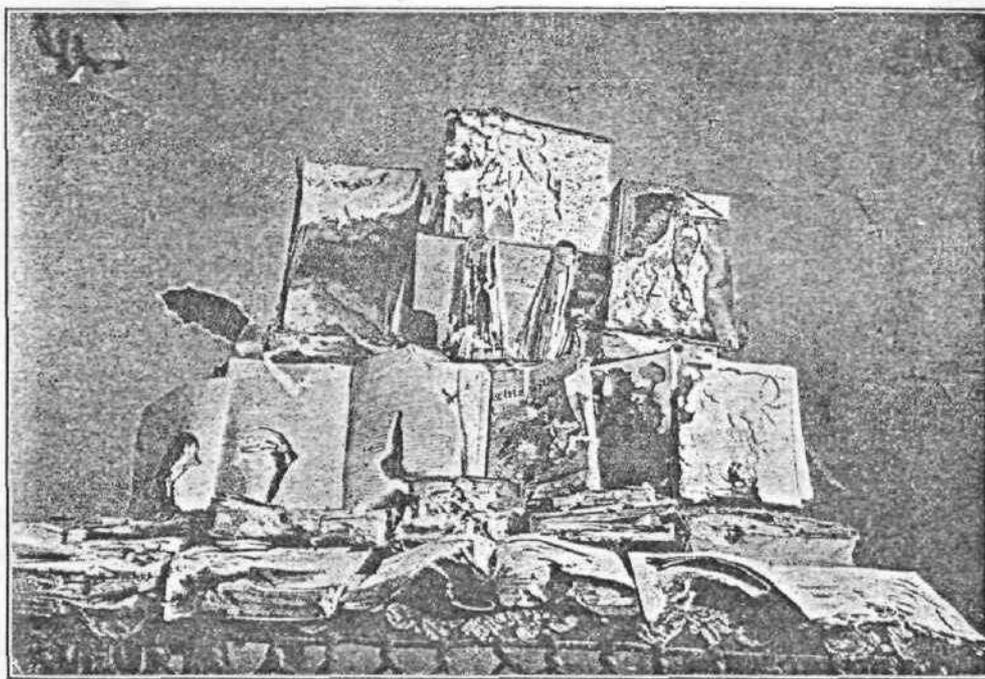
the nominal sum of five cents gold. Several times we were asked, "Why do you sell them so cheaply?" We replied, "So that you will buy them."

For three nights we slept in an Anamese inn. Here we came in personal touch with the natives and found them very friendly. They all sat on the floor in front of us listening to the Gospel for the first time. Nearly all bought books. There was an old school teacher who was chanting a heathen song a few minutes before we began to tell them about Jesus and His love. After we had finished, he bought a Gospel and began reading it aloud. He seemed very much interested in what he was reading. Notwithstanding the illiteracy of the women, they also bought books from us. There was a young man with his wife and mother-in-law alongside of me who had recently begun to smoke opium. Warning him of the danger, a tract was given bearing on the subject. He began to read it and at times he would stop and ponder as if debating whether to give it up or not.

Suddenly he arose and said, "Sell me a Bible." He was under conviction. The writer prayed that he might have the courage of his convictions. In all probability he would have given it up, but his mother-in-law belittled the matter, for she was an opium-smoker too. How my heart ached for him. He was beginning to weave a cable which in time would be too strong for

him to break. Pray for him that even yet he may be freed from this awful habit.

The great day of the pilgrimage was rainy, but that did not hinder or abate the ardor and zeal of the natives. At noon several dragon processions followed in succession. There was a small dragon that marched up to enter the temple. Every step of the way was fought for in order to gain entrance, several times staggering back from sheer exhaustion and seeming defeat, only to rise again and press harder into the fray. At the portals of the temple innumerable evil spirits had congregated, and before he could enter these had to be subdued and swallowed. There were several characters in the procession conspicuous by the sharp instruments thrust into their mouths and piercing their cheeks without the loss of a drop of blood. How this is done is a mystery! There were also some old women prom-



MR. SODERBERG'S BOOKS AFTER THE WHITE ANTS HAD FOUND THEM.

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inent figures in the parade, dressed in gay colored robes. They walked about to attract attention, or ran jingling bells on the end of their staff, or led a procession of natives as if of some deified importance. The expression on their faces was never of good will or compassion, but rather a scowl. To think that they were making an impression for good on the minds of their fellows is more than a sane person could believe.

A huge dragon headed another procession, followed by hundreds of natives bearing on their shoulders a long piece of embroidered cloth and chanting a heathen ritual as they marched. Then came the richly painted furniture, in vermilion and gold. Encased in another piece were several idols with a large supply of eatables and delicacies, followed by a horde of worshipers clasping their hands and calling out in pathetic tones to the gods to hear them, *but all in vain*. Oh, if they could only have seen the emptiness of their religion, the deafness of their idols, and the

utter helplessness to give them the aid they sought!

Beggars took advantage of the opportunity and lined up both sides of the road asking alms of the passers-by. They were of all stages and conditions in life,—men, women, and children, aged, blind, and crippled. Some were a sight to behold, for they literally wallowed in the mud. They were hoarse because of their ceaseless asking and chanting. A more pitiful sight one never saw.

We began our sales as soon as the people had quieted down. Having sold all the sets, a few single copies remained. There was a mad rush and clamor to buy a Gospel portion for half a cent. Throughout there was no ill-spirit manifested, but the good will of the people assembled was gained at the expense of the writer's mistakes in the language. The merry ring of laughter would surge through the crowd, and we could not help but smile in return. Thus the people were polite and respectful, and the blessing of God's hand was felt and realized.

Dear friends, these pilgrims are returning to heathen homes, and some of them are carrying with them the Word of Life. Let us pray that this seed may germinate and bring forth fruit to the *honor and glory of God*. If you have never been in a heathen home, you do not know how great the darkness is there. Can a picture be much darker than this, namely, to be "without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world"? We, who know these conditions and see their blighted, depraved state, invoke the friends everywhere to definite, unceasing prayer in behalf of these benighted souls for their speedy salvation. We, who know the intrinsic value of prayer and the positive power of intercession, let us give ourselves to prayer as we have never done before. Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and the love of the Spirit, that ye *agonize* together with me in your prayers to God, "for these precious blood-bought souls for whom Christ died." PRAY! Beloved, PRAY!