

A VISIT TO NAM DINH.

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Recently the writer made a short itinerating trip to a place called Nam Dinh. The name means "Southern Fortress." It lies in the Great Delta region of Tonkin, the northern province of Indo-China. The land is naturally low and very fertile. It yields large and rich harvests of rice. There are two harvests each year, one in the autumn and the other in the spring. It is an interesting scene to see the natives plowing in the same primitive way that their fathers and forefathers did, namely, with the water-buffaloes and a crude plow. Time does not seemingly count with them, for at the rate they work, you would think they would never get finished. It is hard to say who has established the precedent, man or beast. However, they seem to understand each other and work in harmony. If the animal wishes to stop and see who is passing, the man will wait until it starts again, but sometimes he will reprimand it by saying, "Have you never seen a man before?" This Delta section is not only dissected by the numerous outlets, but canals have been made to connect the cities and towns of any importance, thus they form a large net-work. These make a zigzag route and wind in serpentine fashion, like the Dragon they worship.

My purpose in going to this place was to see what opportunities there are in this province. In the first place, it is the largest of the five provinces of Indo-China, consequently there are more people and a larger area to man. The aggregate population is between 15 and 16 millions. In comparison with the recent statistics of Kwong Sai, South China, there are just twice as many people and more than double the number of square miles. That alone is a tremendous fact, but what shall we say as to the number of workers in both of these provinces. There are over sixty missionaries from different Societies in Kwong Sai and here the writer is the only Protestant missionary among the above mentioned number of people. Is it not appalling when you stop and think of it? And more so when you find out that my appointment is not permanent. In a few months there will be no one here, unless the number of missionaries asked for are forthcoming.

Let me give you some facts. Two hundred and eighty-six years ago, in the year 1627, the first Portuguese Jesuits arrived in Nam Dinh. From that time Catholicism got its first hold and ever since there has been a steady increase of priests, until at present there are one hundred and forty-two Roman Catholic priests in Tonkin alone. Ninety of these are French and the other fifty-two are Spanish. There are 650,000 Roman Catholic adherents in Indo-China, of which 500,000 are in Tonkin. In every city of any size you will find a Catholic church. We are not only confronted with heathen darkness and superstition, and that is prevalent everywhere, but with the Roman Catholic element, which is known to be a barrier and obstacle in the progress of Protestantism. Catholicism is an enemy and a bitter opponent. What has she done all these years of her unlimited control? The people are morally no better. Already the Protestant has been branded as the "Lac Dao," or heretic, and where possible arrests have been made by false accusation.

Although the day of their political power with the State is passed, yet they will try every available means to hinder the spread of the Gospel and the circulation of the Scriptures. The French Government is using every precaution to keep out anarchistic books. At one time there were some Annamese students arrested for distributing revolutionists' articles. So now, the Roman Catholics are saying "the books, which these 'heretics' sell, are the books of revolutionists." Phuc, the colporteur, was arrested on a charge of selling this kind of books. He was taken to the Police Station and the Commissaire sent

him to the French Resident. After examining them and having had some portions read, he said, "Why, these are evangelistic books and not revolutionists' books." So he dismissed the case. There were more Bibles sold during the colporteur's stay than on any other trip. About one hundred and fifty were sold besides other Scripture portions. We pray that the Holy Spirit will illumine these darkened minds and remove the scales from their eyes, that the glorious Light of the Gospel might shed its warming rays in their hearts. Pray that these Annamese may hunger and thirst after the truth as it is found in Christ Jesus.

The occasion which took us there at this season of the year was the returns of the examinations of the Annamese students. Being the last of its kind, it was an unusual feat. These examinations have been held every three years, and although hundreds and thousands have taken them, but a very small per cent. have passed. This time there were about 1,300 students, out of which only thirty succeeded in passing. The scene and method of procedure was unique and interesting.

The space used for the purpose occupied several acres, all of which was gaily decorated with flags, banners, and greens. The day's feat was honored by the French Governor-General of Indo-China. He was the central figure. Around him and by him everything was governed. There were other officials present besides the representatives from the Annamese throne. These Mandarins were most gorgeously dressed. They wore silk robes richly embroidered, for which the natives are noted. Their headdresses were of black gauze, mounted with pure gold and solid silver. At the back of these hats there were two wing-like projections, extending out about eight inches. These seem to have some deification significance, because most of their idols have the same kind of ornamentation onto their head-dress. They wore red leather belts mounted with precious stones. In their hands each one carried a fan in a silver case. These men were attended with all the pomp and pageantry of an Oriental country. There were huge umbrellas, canopies, banners, pendants, flags, swords and spears of all shapes and sizes, and all the paraphernalia that would add grandeur to the occasion. Whole avenues were decorated, and the people thronged the streets from early morn until late in the afternoon.

On the extreme outer circle were the onlookers of the natives. In the form of a semi-circle were the students and their friends. In the centre of the enclosure was a house erected

for the Governor-General, officials, and visiting Europeans. Half way between this grandstand and the entrance were the Mandarins, perched upon high stools. Just in front of them and on either side were the announcers, elevated at a height so as to command a good view and be able to announce the returns distinctly. Many and eager were the hearts to hear the final. They all must have come expecting to receive a reward, for they were prepared; and each one, as he was called, came forward buttoning his coat. There was a pathway which led to the Governor-General, and on either side were the court attendants and standard bearers. The honored student had the privilege of being escorted amid all this pomp. As he stood before the Governor-General he bowed most gracefully. He was then assigned to a place, either to the right or left of the avenue up which he had been escorted and directly in front of the Superior gentleman. After all the names had been called, the honored students assembled to hear two addresses of commendation and congratulation. Following this, they were all presented with new clothes, hats and shoes. Later in the day they were arrayed in their new apparel.

The whole performance, from beginning to end, reminded me of the day when we shall be gathered together to hear *our* final report. There were many anxious and wondering hearts

there that day. The phrase, "Many are called but few are chosen," flashed into my mind, and I thought, how true it will be, out of the large number enrolled how few there will be who will pass with approval and hear the "well done good and faithful servant." The announcers impressed me as those who shall be appointed of God, to call the good and faithful while He shall sit upon His throne and they render Him homage. He will appoint them to their places. Then He will give them new robes. The old tattered and torn garments in which the students came to present themselves, were discarded and the new attire worn. So shall we lay aside the garments defiled by the flesh and put on the raiment of needlework and fine linen. Afterward they became the guests of the Governor-General. Shall we not all sit down at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and be His guests who has bought us with His own precious blood? It was a day of joy and gladness, for their very faces gave evidence of an inward joy. But what is that compared to the gladness and rejoicing that there will be among the ransomed throng? Beloved, we are all taking a final examination. There is a day not far distant in which we shall be called to hear the returns. Are we going to stand with that company before the Throne, clad in raiment of white? We shall, if we are true and faithful to the trust committed unto us. Let us gird ourselves anew with the armor of God having the sword of the Spirit in our hand and our "feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace." Yea, let us send the Good News of Salvation faster that those sitting in the way of the shadow of death may be saved ere it is too late! Annam stretcheth out her hands unto God!

There have been several deputations from Annamese villages. These men have come expressly for the purpose of asking that some one be sent to teach them the Gospel. They have read it and want to become Christians, but, like the Eunuch, they do not understand and need to be led out of heathen darkness into the light and liberty of the Gospel. They ask for a teacher but we cannot send one. We exhorted them to read the Scriptures daily until some one came to teach them. Shall we deny them the truth they are seeking? Is this call not sufficient for any one? What constitutes a call? To my mind, I can answer it in a word—a *need*.

"Perishing, perishing, thronging our pathway,
Hearts break with burdens too heavy to bear;
Jesus would save but there is no one to tell them,
No one to lift them from sin and despair."